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PATTERNS OF SKINHEAD VIOLENCE

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

September, 2008

UMI Number: 3333518

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the people and institutions that made this dissertation possible. I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee; James Tucker, Cliff Brown, Cesar Rebellon, Alynna Lyon, and Nick Smith, for their comments and support. I would also like to thank Deena Peschke and Lynn Beaver for all the advice, support, friendship and coffee. Most of all I wish to acknowledge the unwavering patience and support of my wife, Angela.

I would like to acknowledge the generous financial support I have received over the years from Graduate School of the University of New Hampshire. My dissertation research was made possible by Summer TA Fellowships in 2000 and 2001 and by a Dissertation Year Fellowship. I would also like to acknowledge the research support provided by the UNH Sociology Department through the Arnold S. Linsky Award.

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ABSTRACT

PATTERNS OF SKINHEAD VIOLENCE

By

Derek Bowen

University of New Hampshire, September, 2008

Violence committed by racist skinheads has often been characterized as being motivated by racial hatred and by white supremacist ideology. This ideological aspect has been used to make a distinction between the violent acts committed by racist skinheads and violent acts committed by other groups of young males. Recent research on skinheads has indicated that this distinction may have been overstated. Researchers doing fieldwork with skinheads have found that racist skinheads are involved in violent conflicts with a variety of opponents, and that this violence often lacked an overtly ideological character. Building on this emerging research, I hypothesized that racist skinhead violence was a product of both the skinhead subculture and the social structure of the conflicts in which skinheads are involved. In order to examine the dynamics of skinhead conflict, I conducted 30 face-to-face interviews with current and former racist skinheads in the northeastern United States and Eastern Canada. The subjects in the sample were, or had been, members of five different skinhead groups. These interviews yielded detailed accounts of 211 separate conflicts in which the skinheads had been involved. These accounts were used to create models of events with violent outcomes and events with nonviolent outcomes.

By comparing across cases I was able to identify some factors that seemed to limit the use of violence and others that seemed to promote violent outcomes. The majority of these conflicts were not with members of minority groups or homosexuals, but with other young white males. Most of these adversaries were other skinheads or were affiliated with other youth subcultures. The likelihood of skinheads engaging in violence varied with the social structure of the conflict. The presence of skinhead allies and a lack of crosscutting social ties between the parties involved in a conflict increased the likelihood of violent outcomes. The findings suggest that the social structure of a conflict plays an important role in determining whether conflicts will be handled violently, or in other ways.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I explore the behavior of racist skinheads. The actions of these skinheads are most often discussed in broader contexts, usually with the adult white supremacy movement or hate crimes as the principal object of study. As the body of research on racist skinheads has grown, divergent ideas about the nature of skinhead motivations and actions have emerged. While these ideas challenge many widely held views, they seem to have had little impact on the way racist skinheads are portrayed by the media, activist groups and many academics. This is especially true with regards to the violent behavior of racist skinheads. Racist skinhead violence is often presented as being virtually synonymous with hate crime.

While there are many assumptions made about racist skinhead violence, there is still little research that specifically addresses this issue. In the course of this dissertation I examine some of these assumptions, and evaluate their veracity based on both the available literature and my own findings. I pay particular attention to the few theories that seek to explain where, when, and with whom, racist skinheads engage in violence. I also examine the possibility that a unique theory of skinhead violence might obscure similarities to more general patterns of violent behavior. To achieve this latter goal I will employ Donald Black's structural theory of conflict management. This approach emphasizes the

importance of understanding the social structure of a conflict, with a particular focus on the status of the parties involved in a conflict and the relationships between them.

An advantage of examining skinhead violence or any other type of violence, from a structural perspective is that the focus is shifted from the individual to the violent act. Many theories of violence explain the use of violence by looking at the variation in violent tendencies between individuals. A consistent weakness in such theories is that violent acts tend to be treated as simply an extension of violent tendencies. The problem with this is that even people who could be defined as having strong violent tendencies do not constantly engage in violent behavior, but employ violence in some situations and not in others. To truly explain violence, this within-person variation in behavior needs to be addressed. Under what circumstances will a person engage in violence and when will they choose another strategy to resolve a conflict? By examining violent acts using Black's theory, I am able to address these questions.

Introduction to the Study

Since the late 1980's violence perpetrated by skinheads has been the focus of a great deal of attention. Activist groups, academics and the media have all presented the idea that skinhead violence is largely hate crime. The following quote illustrates this approach to the issue of skinhead violence:

> Consider again skinhead activities. The violence perpetrated by these predominantly young haters is especially brutal. Their attacks on minorities – including racial minorities and gays – often consist of multiple skinheads besetting one or a few targets, armed with a range of lethal weapons. Their brutality is legend (Perry, 2001: 140).

This ideological model of skinhead violence is so widely accepted that many people, including many academics, have seemingly ceased to question whether it is supported by research. It has been noted that many researchers who have studied hate crimes and hate groups, including skinheads, have done so via secondary sources and had little first hand experience with their object of study (Blazak, 1995; Smith, 2000). These researchers have often drawn heavily on information provided by the media and watchdog groups. Not surprisingly the primary focus of these sources was racist and anti-Semitic ideology and hate crimes. The message became that skinheads were violent because of their racist and anti-Semitic beliefs.

Ironically, one of the widely-reported findings in the research on hate crimes is that members of organized ideological groups are not responsible for the majority of hate crimes committed in the United States (Levin and McDevitt, 1993). However, skinheads make better bogeymen than "unremarkable" young white males looking for a thrill (Levin and McDevitt, 1993: 5). It is not being suggested that skinheads do not engage in violence against minorities, but rather that it may be a mistake to view this as the only, or even the principal type of violence in which they are involved. To illustrate how the focus on ideology can confuse our understanding of skinhead violence we can look at the example Barbara Perry, a university professor and the author of *In the Name of Hate*, uses to follow up her characterization of skinhead violence presented at the beginning of this section:

> Amid shouts of "you're gonna' die," over a dozen members of the group invaded the party, wielding knives, chains, pipes, an ax handle and a broomstick. . . The Skinheads directed most of their rage at 22 year old Jason Linsky. . . . The leader of the group. . . straddled the victim's beaten body and stabbed him nine times. (Klanwatch report quoted in Perry, 2001: 140).

This is unquestionably an account of a brutal act of violence perpetrated by skinheads. However, the *Jayson* Linsky case is an odd choice for Perry to use as an example as it was not a bias motivated crime nor was it a random attack. Perry never clarifies the details of the incident allowing the reader to believe that this is an example of the "attacks on minorities" that she identifies as typical "skinhead activities." According to news accounts and court records the Linsky case involved a group of skinheads who were expelled from a Halloween party. The skinheads left and gathered some friends and weapons and returned to the party to get revenge. Linsky, who was dressed in a red devil costume, was allegedly targeted because one of the skinheads' female friends claimed he had spit in her face when they were being thrown out of the party ("Man Charged", 1996, "John Tague", 2001).

There is a disconnect between the facts of the Linsky case, and the context in which Perry places it. While the case involved skinheads who acted violently, it lacks the ideological component that she argues is characteristic of skinhead violence. It is also strikingly similar in many ways to accounts of retaliatory attacks involving other types of gangs. It was noted in the press coverage of the Linsky killing that two other recent parties in Massachusetts had also ended in killings. These other cases did not involve skinheads, suggesting

that participation in violence of this nature is not limited to skinheads ("Deaths", 1996).

I am not suggesting that Perry's use of the Jayson Linsky case represents an intentional attempt to mislead. It does however illustrate the risks inherent in reporting the findings of activist groups without considering the biases or agenda of such a group. Perry obtained her information from a brief summary of the Linsky case presented in a Klanwatch publication. The summary seems to have been based on early media reports of the case in which the victim's name was misspelled. Klanwatch is a watchdog project run by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). In recent years the SPLC has actively lobbied for tougher hate crime laws, and been involved in a series of civil lawsuits against white supremacist organizations (Kaplan, 1997). The SPLC's activist agenda hardly qualifies the organization for the role of objective observer. Information from this type of source can be useful, but should also be treated critically given the organization's agenda.

The facts surrounding Jayson Linsky's murder suggest not only that it was an inappropriate example for Perry's purposes, but also that it provides support for an alternative conception of skinhead violence. The skinheads in the Linsky case were angry about having been thrown out of a party, and specifically angry at Linsky because of the alleged spitting incident. Their subsequent actions could be viewed as an attempt to redress an injustice they felt had been done to them. While most people would not view the skinheads' actions as appropriate in either kind or magnitude, from the skinheads' perspective violent retribution was

what the situation called for. It should also be noted that the willingness to retaliate violently against the people who expelled the skinheads from the party was not limited to the original group of skinheads, but extended to those they recruited as reinforcements for the second visit to the party. It could be argued that it was the willingness of these latter skinheads to become actively involved in the conflict that made it possible for the original group to act on their desire for revenge, and led to the tragic events that followed.

Statement of the Problem

Ideas about racist skinheads and racist skinhead violence have been heavily influenced by the media and watchdog groups. These influences pervaded the early academic work on North American skinheads done by researchers like Mark Hamm. Hamm (1993) argued that racist skinheads were a unique phenomenon because their violent behavior was motivated by white supremacist ideology. This conception of racist skinheads has persisted in the face of contrary research findings. Therefore the goal of this study is to both evaluate previously offered explanations of skinhead violence and to examine the utility of an alternative explanation developed from the analysis of the social structure of racist skinhead conflicts.

Research Objectives

This dissertation had the following research objectives:

1. To examine the nature and extent of violent behavior that racist skinheads are involved in.

2. To examine how these acts of violence are similar or different from the conceptions of skinhead violence that have often been presented.
3. To examine whether skinhead violence is a unique phenomenon or whether it can be explained using Black's general theory of conflict management.

Theoretical Framework

My approach to this research is guided by the theoretical perspective of Donald Black. Black's theory of conflict management states that the nature of conflict management used in a given instance is influenced by the social structure of that specific case. By casting social control as the dependent variable, Black's paradigm allows the researcher to link social relationships to conflict management outcomes. By comparing across cases it can be seen that cases with certain types of relationship structures tend to have similar outcomes. Black's theoretical formulations have been used to examine conflict management in a wide array of settings including the workplace (Morrill, 1989, 1992, 1995; Tucker, 1989, 1993, 1999), suburban neighborhoods (Baumgartner, 1988), the court system (Kruttschnitt 1981; Staples, 1987; Radelet, 1989), and the playground (Baumgartner, 1992). Black's theory has also provided the theoretical basis for the studies of homicide (Cooney, 1988, 1991, 1997, 1999), collective violence (De La Roche, 1996, 2001), mental illness (Horwitz, 1982), new age religion (Tucker, 2002), and terrorism (Black, 2002).

In order to examine how the relationship structure of an event might promote or mediate violence, I used data from 30 face-to-face interviews with current and former racist skinheads in the eastern United States and eastern

Canada. Detailed accounts of conflicts were used to create models of both conflicts in which skinheads acted violently and conflicts in which they did not. By comparing across cases, I am able to identify some relationship structures that seem to prevent or limit the use of violence and others that seemed to promote violence. I focus on both conflicts between members of skinhead groups and conflicts between skinheads and people outside the group.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used quite frequently throughout my dissertation. Since many of these terms may be interpreted in different ways I am providing this list of operational definitions.

Subculture

A basic sociological definition of subcultures is that they are smaller and distinctive cultural groups that exist inside the framework of a larger parent culture, "a culture within a culture" (Newman, 2000: 85). The term subculture has been used in a variety of ways in sociology and criminology. For the purposes of this dissertation I will be using the following definition of subculture:

> Subcultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artifacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the 'parent' culture (Clarke et al, 1997: 100).

In North America there is a large variety of subcultures that are predominantly youth oriented. "An endless array of ardent skaters, skins, rockers, ravers, rebels, heshers, punks, Goths, jocks, Rude Boys, hippies, preps

. . ." (Finnegan, 1998: 349). Skinheads are one element in this subcultural landscape.

Skinhead

A skinhead is an adherent of the skinhead subculture. The skinhead subculture originated in England in the late 1960's, died out, then made a comeback in the late 1970's and since then has spread around the world (Walker, 1980; Moore, 1993). Skinhead style is visually distinctive and stresses toughness and masculinity. Skinheads usually have shaved or very short hair and wear short military style "bomber" jackets and heavy steel-toed boots with rolled up jeans (Young and Craig, 1997; Wooden and Blazak, 2001). Skinhead values also emphasize toughness and masculinity. Core activities include "fighting, drinking and 'hitting on' young women" (Smith, 2000: 60).

Racist Skinhead

Over the years the skinhead subculture has split into a number of factions. Some of the major factions are racist skinheads, antiracist skinheads, and nonpolitical skinheads sometimes referred to as traditional skinheads. The main focus of this dissertation is racist skinheads. The main difference between racist skinheads and other types of skinheads is that racist skinheads overtly profess a belief in white supremacy. This is not to say that other skinheads do not hold racist views but rather that they do not make those views central to skinhead identity in the way racist skinheads do (Young and Craig, 1997).

Crew

Skinhead collectives are often referred to as "crews" (Young and Craig, 1997; Smith, 2000). Some of the research on skinheads suggests that skinhead crews are not highly organized. These studies describe groups with a fluid membership and often no clearly defined leadership (Baron, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997; Leet et al, 2000). Some accounts describe racist skinheads as being only weakly attached to any specific crew, frequently switching group allegiances (Smith, 2000; Blee, 2002). For the purposes of this dissertation a skinhead who is part of a crew will be referred to as a crewmember.

Adult White Supremacist Organizations

Adult white supremacist organizations have a defined organizational structure and leadership and tend to persist over time. Examples of adult white supremacist organizations include the Aryan Nation, National Alliance and the Ku Klux Klan. Some racist skinheads have ties to adult white supremacist organizations, while others do not (Hamm, 1993; Baron, 1997; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile; 1997).

Scene

A scene encompasses all the places where skinheads regularly congregate. A scene exists in both time and space, as what constitutes the scene for skinheads in a given city will continually change over time (Moore, 1994; Blazak, 1995; Smith, 2000). In any given city the racist skinhead scene will generally overlap the scenes of other subcultures including antiracist skinheads and punk rockers (Blazak, 1995; Wooden and Blazak, 2001).

Conflict

In this dissertation, a major focus of study is conflict. A conflict occurs when one person or group has a grievance against another person or group. "Conflict occurs whenever anyone provokes or expresses a grievance. It occurs whenever someone engages in conduct that someone else defines as deviant or whenever someone subjects someone else to social control" (Black, 1998: *xiii*). A conflict may be handled with or without violence.

Conflict Management

Donald Black refers to the manner in which a person responds to a grievance as conflict management. Conflict management is social control in that it responds to behavior defined as deviant, and Black uses the terms conflict management and social control interchangeably. Black identifies five basic forms of conflict management; self-help (violence), avoidance, negotiation, settlement, and toleration. Each of these forms contains a wide range of behaviors from the very subtle to the extreme, and from the commonplace to the very rare (Black, 1998).

Violence

For the purposes of this dissertation I will be using Scott Phillips' definition of violence. "Violence includes actual force and attempted force, but it does not include the threat of force or minor pushing or shoving that does not escalate to serious force" (Phillips, 2003: 686). As with the inner-city males studied by Phillips, verbal threats and minor pushing and shoving are commonplace among

skinheads so it is important to separate those behaviors from more serious acts of violence.

First Party

When conflicts are described in this dissertation they will be described in terms of the relationships between the various parties involved. The first party in any conflict is one of the principal parties involved. The first party in the conflict is the party engaging in conflict management to redress a grievance (Black, 1984; 1998). The first party is always a racist skinhead who is a member of one of the crews studied in the course of this research.

Second Party

The second party in a conflict is the other principal party, the party that is the source of a real or perceived grievance. First party conflict management is directed at the second party. A second party may play an active role in the creation of a conflict by challenging or insulting the first party, or they may be involved through the logic of collective liability where the first party has a grievance against all people in a specific social category (Black, 1984, 1998).

Third Parties

Third parties are any parties outside the principal parties who are aware of a conflict. Third parties may do nothing, or they may act as peacemakers or take sides. Third party behavior can be seen as a function of the relationships between the third parties and the principal parties in a conflict (Black, 1998; Cooney, 1998; Phillips and Cooney, 2005).

Overview of Remaining Chapters

In the first part of the next chapter I will provide a short history of the skinhead subculture. I describe the origin of the subculture and how the links to racism developed. The emergence of the subculture in the United States and the skinheads' subsequent notoriety will also be addressed. I will then look at how the media and watchdog groups shaped the public and academic discourse about skinheads.

In the second part of chapter 2, I address some of the common conceptions about skinheads and consider three specific theories that attempt to explain skinhead violence. I then consider the utility of using a more general theory of conflict to explain skinhead violence, in this case Donald Black's general theory of conflict management. In the last part of the chapter I consider the strengths of Black's Theory and argue that using this theory allows the researcher to see patterns of social behavior that may be obscured by other approaches.

In Chapter 3 I describe the methodology of the study. First I provide a brief evaluation of the different ways in which academics have approached the study of skinheads. I also look at some specific issues and challenges related to studying skinheads. The design of the current study is described and a description of the variables used is provided.

Chapter 4 offers a description of the racist skinhead subculture. Many aspects of the subculture are addressed including membership, organization, attitudes, activities, political affiliations, and reasons for joining or leaving.

Particular attention is paid to skinhead collectives, often referred to as crews. The structure of the crews is important because organizational structure has been shown to influence how both internal and external conflicts are handled in a variety of settings (Morrill, 1989, 1992, 1995; Tucker, 1989, 1993, 1999; Baumgartner, 1992).

In chapter 5, conflicts with people outside the crews are examined. Conflicts with members of minority groups, other skinheads and members of other subcultures, as well other miscellaneous outsiders are all considered. Similarities and differences between conflicts with these groups as well as general patterns of violent behavior are examined.

In chapter 6, conflicts inside the crews are examined. The role of variables such as personal ties, status and in-group third party behavior is considered. The relationship between organizational and cultural aspects of the crews and common methods of resolving conflicts are examined.

In chapter 7 I discuss overall patterns of violence and conflict. I argue that the role of some variables, specifically racist ideology and alcohol use, may have been overemphasized and that the analysis of structural variables across cases offers a plausible alternative explanation for skinhead violence. Because assumptions about skinhead violence have often been linked to the real or perceived sources of their violent tendencies, I stress the importance of looking beyond violent tendencies in order to explain violent acts. I discuss the benefits of Black's theoretical approach, and evaluate my contributions to the structural

theory of conflict management. The limitations of the current study and avenues for further research are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

SKINHEADS AND VIOLENCE

In the first part of this chapter, I will provide a short historical overview addressing the questions, who are the skinheads? Where did they come from? And why is racism part of their subculture? In the second part of the chapter I will examine how the media and watchdog groups shaped public and academic discourse about skinheads. In the final section of the chapter I will discuss three ways in which researchers have sought to explain skinhead violence, and suggest the possibility that a more general theory of conflict offers a plausible alternative explanation.

A Brief History of Skinheads

British Skinheads

The First Wave. The skinheads may be among the most infamous of all youth subcultures. Originating in England in the late 1960's, the skinhead style has always been closely tied to violent behavior (Pearson, 1976; Clarke and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). The following account provides a description of these first generation skinheads:

> The skinheads' appearance contrasted dramatically with the prevailing trend of Hippy hedonism. These lads sported an aggressively tough, workman-like look of heavy industrial boots, Ben Sherman shirts, Levi jeans or Sta-pressed trousers held up by red braces. Their clothes [were] streamlined for fighting. But above all it was the way they closely shaved their heads at a time when flowing locks had become the central symbol of pop liberation that made them look like arch-villains. . . Football (well,

tribal affiliation to a particular team) was central to their cult and they were heavily into violence (Stuart, 1987: 106-7).

While the violence of the early skinheads had some racial overtones, it was not motivated by white supremacist ideology. The original skinheads had a fondness for American soul music as well as the reggae and ska music that West Indian immigrants had brought with them to England (Hebdige, 1979; Walker, 1980; Olwell, 2003). While these early skinheads had an affinity for West Indian music and style, they demonstrated little tolerance for other immigrant groups. Asians, especially those from Pakistan and India were favorite targets for abuse (Pearson, 1976; Clark and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). One explanation is that these groups were targeted because they were the most culturally different from the skinheads (Pearson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979).

The Second Wave. By the mid 1970's the skinhead style had gone out of fashion (Hebdige, 1979). Skinheads made a comeback as part of the punk sub-culture of the late 1970's (Walker, 1980; Moore, 1993; Kinsella, 1994). While some continued to listen to ska, many were drawn to punk bands like Sham 69 and the Cockney Rejects whose street-oriented blend of rock and roll and soccer match sing-a-longs would later become known as "Oi" music (Walker, 1980; Kinsella, 1994). While it might be argued that Oi music represented a break between the skinheads and West Indian culture, it is certainly true that the early Oi bands laid a foundation that was later exploited by influential racist skinhead bands, most notably Skrewdriver (Hamm, 1993; Moore, 1993; Kinsella, 1994).

Skinheads and the National Front. It was in the late 1970's and early 1980's that some British skinheads became involved with racist organizations like

the ultra right-wing National Front (Walker, 1980; Hamm, 1993; Moore, 1993). The racism and nationalism of the skinheads made them ripe for harvesting by National Front organizers. It is important to note, however, that not all British skinheads became involved with organized racism (Walker, 1980). Many of the skinheads who did embrace a racist identity showed little interest in the daily grind of political party involvement. Phil Cohen (1999) points out that for many skinheads the National Front's initials came to stand for "No Fun":

> If The National Front were No Fun it was much the same reason as any other political party. Active membership involved more than going on marches and hurling abuse or broken bottles at the enemy; it meant attending meetings, addressing envelopes, delivering leaflets and all the other humdrum tasks attractive only to the committed few (Cohen, 1999: 262).

American Skinheads

The first wave of skinheads had little impact in North America. Skinheads on these shores grew out of the domestic punk/hardcore music scene of the late 1970's and early 1980's (Moore, 1993; Wood, 1999). It has been suggested that the emergence of skinheads in the United States was due in part to the machinations of organized racist groups (Ridgeway, 1990; Barkan and Snowden, 2001), but there is little convincing evidence to support this claim. It seems more plausible that youths were originally attracted to the style as a variant of punk, and that the ties to organized racism crystallized later (Wood, 1999; Smith, 2000).

Racist Skinheads. Some of the American youths who adopted the skinhead style also latched on to the violent and racist aspects of the British version of the subculture (Coplon, 1988; Ridgeway, 1990; Hamm, 1993; Moore,

1993). Whether these youths were attracted to the skinhead subculture because it provided an outlet for preexisting racist beliefs, or whether involvement in skinhead groups promoted the development of racist viewpoints, is open to debate. What is certain is that from the mid 1980's onward violent racist skinheads made their presence felt in many parts of the country. In 1988 two incidents, a violent brawl on Geraldo Rivera's talk show and the killing of an Ethiopian immigrant named Mulugeta Seraw in Portland Oregon; both made national headlines, establishing the reputation of skinheads as a new kind of threat to society.

Racist skinheads in the United States have often linked to adult white supremacist organizations by the media and watchdog groups. However, there is little evidence that American skinheads are any more politically committed than their English counterparts. Former white supremacist organizer George Burdi has described the levels of commitment to the white supremacy movement among skinheads as extremely low: "A large percentage of Skinheads, especially in North America, are really hard-core alcoholics. It's too much to expect them to put fliers on cars, but they'll jump at the chance to buy beer" (Burdi quoted in SPLC, 2001).

The Media and Watchdog Groups

Through the 1980's and early 1990's academic research on American skinheads was practically nonexistent. The primary sources of information on skinheads were the media and watchdog groups such as the anti-defamation League (ADL) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). The information

provided by the media and watchdog groups framed the public discourse about skinheads in ways that still influence our understanding of skinheads today.

The Media

North American skinheads came to the attention of the media in the late 1980's. The "discovery" of groups of young white supremacists made for sensational news stories. With titles like "Skinhead Reich" (Coplon, 1989), these articles stressed the threat posed by skinheads by focusing on expressions of racist ideology and acts of brutality. Articles like "Skinhead Reich" and Jeff Coplon's earlier Rolling Stone article "Skinhead Nation" (1988) also implied that skinheads posed a significant threat to the American way of life. The media attention became more intense in 1988 after a televised brawl on Geraldo Rivera's talk show and the killing of Mulugeta Seraw. Many racist skinheads seemed to revel in the ensuing public notoriety.

In his analysis of early media coverage of Canadian skinheads, Murry Forman (1992) argues that this coverage focused on the most superficial aspects of the skinhead subculture. No real attempt was made to understand the skinheads and, as a result, the media coverage promoted a number of misconceptions. It is not surprising that the media were focused only on the racism and violence of the skinheads, as it is these qualities that made them newsworthy in the first place. Once the skinheads became recognized and categorized by the media, a flurry of articles and talk show appearances followed. Since estimates of the skinhead presence in North America in the 1980's and 1990's put their numbers at 1000 to 3500 (Hamm, 1993), it is fair to

ask whether the actual threat posed by skinheads was exaggerated by the extent of the media coverage.

From the last months of 1988 into the 1990's skinheads received constant media attention. Their newsworthiness was established after a heavily hyped episode of Geraldo Rivera's talk show featuring a brawl between skinheads and audience members drew the most viewers a daytime talk show had ever had (Hamm, 1993). Rivera, who suffered a broken nose as a result of the brawl, called the show "great television" and later noted the role of his publicist in creating the ensuing media sensation (Langer, 2003). After the episode featuring the brawl the number of viewers tuning into Rivera's show on a regular basis increased dramatically. While the more mainstream news media denounced Rivera's tactics as sensationalistic and even offensive, this didn't prevent them from repeatedly showing clips and photos from Rivera's show, and interviewing everyone involved in the brawl (Langer, 2003). A media circus surrounded the skinheads driven largely by the belief that coverage of skinheads would attract viewers (Christensen, 1994).

Two important things occurred as a result of this extensive media coverage. The first was the establishment of the link between skinhead racism and violence in the public consciousness. The second was the implication that the skinheads constituted a growing threat to society (Forman, 1992). Talk shows justified the attention they gave to skinheads and other white-supremacists by claiming that they were examining a growing problem in society (Langer, 2003). However, it is not clear that there was any substantial growth in

the number of racist skinheads during this time period. Anti-Defamation League statistics do imply a large increase in the number of skinheads between 1987 and 1989, from a few hundred to several thousand (reported in Hamm, 1993). While this does suggest a growing number of skinheads, the method used to arrive at these numbers is unclear. The sheer magnitude of the alleged increase alone suggests that these numbers may reflect an increased focus on skinheads on the part of the ADL, rather than a massive increase in actual numbers of skinheads. In response to the intensive coverage of skinheads, some members of the media questioned the extent of the actual threat posed by skinheads. During a period in the late 1980's several articles about skinheads appeared in Montreal newspapers. In response a senior editor at the *Montreal Gazette* suggested that the threat posed by skinheads had been greatly overstated in the press (Forman, 1992).

Our impressions of violent phenomena are often shaped by claims makers, people or institutions who present a particular conception of a phenomenon that is in line with their own interests (Brownstein, 2000). It was in the interest of the media to present skinheads as a sinister and growing threat to society. The coverage could be justified as providing information about a new public menace, but it was the ratings that the shows featuring skinheads generated that determined the amount of coverage they received. It is probably safe to suggest that the media attention was excessive given the relatively small number of racist skinheads. Because the media chose to focus on the sensationalistic aspects of the skinhead subculture, specifically racism and

violence, the large amount of media attention did not translate into a greater understanding of the skinhead subculture. Instead media accounts of skinheads were often riddled with misinformation. Racist skinheads became frustrated with what they saw as the media's negative portrayal of their subculture, and non-racist skinheads were frustrated, and potentially endangered by the message that all skinheads were racist (Forman, 1992; Christensen, 1994).

The Watchdog Groups

There are a number of activist groups in the United States that monitor the activities of white supremacist organizations. The most prominent of these groups are the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Both groups offer a range of publications that provide information on the activities of various white supremacist organizations, including skinheads. Information provided by these watchdog groups was used extensively in early academic research on North American skinheads.

The information supplied by the watchdog groups can be a useful resource and is supplied for free to law enforcement agencies, educators and academics. However, it must be remembered that these watchdog groups have their own agendas. In her review of Jack B. Moore's *Skinheads Shaved for Battle*, Betty Dobratz offers the following caution:

> At the same time, however, one should recognize that these "watchdog" groups, like all organizations, have their own agenda in characterizing groups like the skinheads. This includes drawing critical attention to racist groups and soliciting money to work against them. Thus, one can expect watchdog groups to give a partial picture about skinheads stressing the negative aspects, including their violence (Dobratz, 1996: 369).

Both the ADL and SPLC have shown themselves to have goals beyond simply monitoring white supremacist groups. The ADL has long been an active proponent of hate crime laws, and was the first group to promote hate crime legislation with increased penalties for offenders (Judson and Bertazzoni, 2002). The SPLC has been involved in successful civil lawsuits against a number of white supremacist organizations including the White Aryan Resistance and the Aryan Nations (Judson and Bertazzoni, 2002; Langer, 2003). Both groups have pursued a strategy of exposing and working against the activities of white supremacist organizations (Kaplan, 1997).

One of the most influential claims made by the watchdog groups was that the skinheads had strong ties to adult white supremacist organizations. This claim was the basis of the SPLC's lawsuit against WAR leader Tom Meztger. Morris Dees, the director of the SPLC, argued that Meztger had incited Portland skinheads to violence through the influence of his WAR organization. The result, according to Dees, was the killing of Mulugeta Seraw (Judson and Bertazzoni, 2002; Langer, 2003). The ruling against Metzger seemed to imply that the adult white supremacist organizations controlled the skinheads. However the case against Metzger did not hinge on Metzger's having direct control over the skinheads but rather relied on the theory that a skinhead member of WAR named Dave Mazzella had, on Meztger's orders, gone to Portland to organize the skinheads there. Whether Mazzella was actually acting for Metzger, and whether he had any real influence over the Portland skinheads has never been entirely clear. To confuse matters even further Mazzella quickly

turned informant and acted as a key witness against Meztger at the trial (Langer, 2003).

Observers of both the media and watchdog group coverage of skinheads have come to similar conclusions. Forman (1992) notes that the media's construction of skinheads as a danger to society greatly exaggerated the threat they realistically posed. Kaplan (1997) argues that the watchdog groups have exaggerated the threat posed by small and largely impotent groups because it is in their own interest to preserve the impression of an ongoing threat to the American way of life.

Influence on Academic Discourse

The information provided by the media and watchdog groups has influenced the academic discourse on skinheads. Early academic accounts of skinheads in North America were often culled from secondary sources, largely consisting of information provided by the media and watchdog groups (Dobratz, 1996). For example, in his academic book on the rise of income inequality in the United States *The Rich Get Richer*, Denny Braun makes the following statement: "In particular, skinheads, young adult and teenage whites, are becoming a major force in our nation's cities. These angry young men, incapable of earning a decent living because of poor education and lack of jobs that pay a living wage, are taking out their frustrations on innocent African Americans and immigrants" (Braun, 1997: 409-10). Braun's assertion that skinheads are a "major force" echoes the sensationalism of the media response to skinheads. This is unsurprising given that Braun's source for this information is a single magazine

article. However, the repetition of a media assertion in an academic source gives it a validity it may otherwise have lacked.

When researchers began to study skinheads firsthand they approached the subject with preconceptions garnered from media accounts and watchdog group bulletins. It is unlikely that Mark Hamm would have given Tom Meztger such a central role in his explanation of skinhead behavior if he had not been exposed to the media coverage that followed the killing of Mulugeta Seraw. Even now, nearly 15 years after the publication of Hamm's *American Skinheads*, academic discussion of skinheads is most often in the context of the white supremacy movement or hate crimes research. The messages promoted by the media and watchdog groups of a causal link between racism and violence, and of strong ties to white supremacist organizations have become cornerstones of the academic discourse on skinheads.

In recent years a number of firsthand studies of skinheads have raised questions about the veracity of these ideas. In the next section I will review three explanations of skinhead violence. Mark Hamm's influential theory of skinhead violence argues for a causal connection between racist propaganda and violent behavior. Emery Smith's model examines the central role of action in the skinhead subculture. Lastly, Stephen Baron explains skinhead violence as a product of life in a street-level subculture.

Three Explanations of Skinhead Violence

Theories of Violent Action

Many sociological and criminological theories of violence suggest that the use of violence is best explained by looking at the variation in violent tendencies between individuals. A variety of causes of variation, from poor socialization to economic and social strain, to chemical and hormonal reactions have been identified. However, one consistent weakness in such theories is that violent acts tend to be treated as simply an extension of violent tendencies. The problem with this is that even people with a heightened proclivity for violence do not constantly engage in violent behavior, but employ violence in some situations and not in others.

Racist skinheads are a case in point. As a subculture, skinheads embrace violence. It influences their style of dress, and features prominently in skinhead symbolism and music. And yet, skinheads are not always violent. There has been a fair amount of research into why youths become skinheads, looking for the sources of their violent tendencies, but relatively little examining their violent actions.

The violent tendencies of racist skinheads have been attributed to a variety of factors. As the label racist skinhead implies, the members of these groups are set apart from other skinheads by their expression of overt white supremacist beliefs. Racist skinheads express a belief that their futures are threatened by economic decline and they blame Jews and minorities for the economic problems facing the country (SPLC 1999[1], Blazak; 1999).

Researchers have also found that many skinheads feel as if the "real America" a place largely defined by the cultural dominance of White males, is rapidly disappearing and are quick to blame social gains made by minorities, women and homosexuals for the change (Langer, 1990; Kleg, 1993; Finnegan, 1998; SPLC, 1999[1]; Blazak, 1999; Blazak, 2001). Whether such threats to status and economic wellbeing are directly experienced or simply perceived to exist does not seem to matter greatly (SPLC, 1999 [1]; Blazak, 1999).

The media and watchdog groups where quick to link violent skinhead behavior to organized adult racist groups, such as the White Aryan Resistance, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Aryan Nations (Moore, 1993; Young and Craig, 1997; Best, 1999). Many observers of the racist right have questioned the nature of the ties between skinheads and more established racist groups. Some have pointed out that the chaotic lifestyle of many skinheads does not merge well with focused political activity (Ezekiel, 1995; Baron, 1997; Etter, 1999; Smith, 2000). Racist organizers seem to have often found skinheads difficult to recruit, and even harder to control (Langer, 1990; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; Smith, 2000).

Gang researcher Dan Korem has argued that family dysfunction is the major reason that youths become skinheads (Korem, 1994). This position is in line with the self-control theory of delinquency (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). This theory states that an individual's level of self-control is set in early childhood and remains relatively constant throughout life. Low self-control is the result of poor family socialization, and makes an individual more prone to committing deviant acts.

Some skinheads unquestionably come from broken or troubled homes (Korem, 1994; Baron, 1997; SPLC, 1998[1]; SPLC, 1999[2], Leet, Rush and Smith, 2000). Wooden (1995) found that having been bullied or abused earlier in life was the strongest predictor of becoming a racist skinhead. However, this does not seem to be true in all cases. In fact, much of the research on skinheads suggests that there is a large degree of variation in home-life characteristics of skinheads (Langer, 1990; Kleg, 1993; Moore, 1993; Hamm, 1993).

While factors such as white supremacist values, an uncertain future or a dysfunctional family background may offer explanations of why a skinhead might be prone to aggressive behavior, they are less useful in explaining violent actions. To illustrate the problems with viewing violent tendencies as explanations of violence I'll use the example of racism.

Support for the idea that racism is the motivating factor behind skinhead violence in the United States is widespread among academics (Hamm, 1993; Barkan and Snowden, 2001; Perry, 2001; Parker and Tuthill, 2005). This seems to be a fairly clear cut case as the racist skinheads self-identify as racists and display white power and Nazi symbols. However, when looking at skinhead violence across cases one begins to notice a large number of white victims who are neither homosexual nor Jewish. During a surge in skinhead violence in Ventura, California in 1999 the police noted that "many of the attacks do not even appear to be motivated by race or religion" (Dirmann, 1999: B1). The fact that skinheads are prone to attacking whites as well as minorities makes explanations of violence based on their racism problematic.

Unlike theories of violent tendencies which largely focus on background factors, theories of violent actions focus on the context in which violence occurs. These theories seek to explain when, where, why and with whom acts of violence are likely to take place. In the academic literature on skinheads I identified three studies that offered explanations of skinhead violence that attempted to some degree to answer these questions.

Mark Hamm - Skinheads as Ideological Racists

In his book *American Skinheads: the Criminology and Control of Hate Crime* Mark Hamm (1993) argues that racist skinheads are a distinctive phenomenon from other forms of gang activity. He argues that the majority of gang activity involves minority groups from the lower social classes, whereas skinheads are members of the socially dominant group and come from a variety of social classes. Hamm argues that gang behavior is a reaction against the forces of economics and racism that oppress minority underclass youth. He further argues that since these forces cannot be used to explain skinhead behavior, such behavior should be considered a different phenomenon. Hamm also points to his finding that youth join skinhead groups "as an explicit function of their own strident racism" (1993: 62). He suggests the term "terrorist youth subculture" should be used to distinguish racist skinheads from other types of gangs (1993:65).

Although racist skinheads occasionally present themselves as white revolutionaries, Hamm suggests that they might be better characterized as ultra-conservatives. He describes the skinheads he studied as ". . . working class

conformists with a hyperactive commitment to the goals and means of the dominant American culture" (1993: 130). Hamm goes on to portray his terrorist skinheads as having strong ties to family and to each other as well as having defined goals for their future. This is an interesting finding because by the logic of most theories of deviant behavior, people with these characteristics should be conformists not deviants. At this point I will note that Hamm's finding that skinheads tend to have strong social ties to family and friends has not been replicated in subsequent studies.

The seeming lack of individual background factors that might explain the skinheads' violent behavior, leads Hamm to assert that they are motivated by propaganda provided by adult white supremacist groups. He argues that potential skinheads are first exposed to white supremacist rock music, specifically that of the British band Skrewdriver, and that the music turns them on to the message of white supremacy. This primes them for involvement in the skinhead subculture and exposure to the ideology of the adult white supremacist organizations. However, skinhead researcher Randy Blazak has identified a flaw in this causal argument. "A problem is the importance Hamm puts on racist music as a lure into a fascist lifestyle. It has been my experience that skinheads are exposed to this music *after* they become skinheads" (1995: 35).

As he constructs his argument linking white supremacist influence and skinhead violence Hamm makes a number of assertions many criminologists would find problematic. First, he argues that skinhead violence is instrumental in nature. "As seen by subcultural members, it is a necessary way of protecting

group values" (Hamm, 1993: 156). He supports this conception with claims made by skinheads that they only engage in violence when provoked by others. "Every fight I've ever been in has been started by other people. The color of another person's skin is not relevant. They can't deal with the way I look, and I defend myself" (Bronx skinhead quoted in Hamm, 1993: 155). While Hamm sees this as evidence of the instrumental nature of skinhead violence, other criminologists would probably see it as a typical way of justifying violent behavior. Sykes and Matza (1957) argued that people who commit deviant acts often learn to justify their actions, a process they called neutralization. One type of neutralization identified by Sykes and Matza is the denial of the victim which involves transferring the blame for a deviant act to the victim. Members of violent youth cultures often blame their victims for provoking violence. "Between predatory inclination and the practice of violence, there is an intermediary process by which the responsibility for the attack is transferred to the other side" (Katz, 1988: 140). The fact that Hamm also leaves a large amount of ambiguity about what constitutes provocation to skinheads further confuses this issue.

Hamm's description of skinhead violence as instrumental is also questionable. In most common definitions of instrumental violence, such violence is conceived as either a path to some desired reward (Tedeschi and Felson, 1994), or as a product of social expectations (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967). Hamm's model of skinhead violence does not really fit either of these definitions. In the case of skinheads it is difficult to argue that "protecting group values" is a desired outcome achieved by violence because the "group values"

place such an emphasis on violent behavior. Other researchers have found that violent behavior is a kind of subcultural currency for skinheads and that it plays a central role in shaping a skinhead's reputation (Baron, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997; Smith, 2000). Hamm supports his instrumental conception of skinhead violence by focusing on values as the source of conflicts. However, if we consider the possibility that the act of provocation is more important, the violent acts Hamm describes have a lot in common with what criminologists have described as hostile or moralistic violence. Hostile violence involves an angry response to provocation and a desire to inflict injury on the offending party (Berkowitz, 1978; Farrington et al, 1982). The concept of moralistic violence describes the response to provocation as a moralistic response to a perceived offense (Black, 1984; Katz, 1988).

Hamm also makes some controversial assertions about the role of deviant peers in the skinhead subculture. He argues that deviant peers do not play an important role in reinforcing the definition of violence as an acceptable behavior. He instead argues that because the skinheads view their violence as a form of self-defense, it does not violate the norms of the larger society, and thus does not require deviant reinforcement.

Having made an argument for violence being a product of the defense of white supremacist values, Hamm addresses the context of skinhead violence. He argues that white supremacist values, as measured by exposure to white supremacist propaganda, are linked to social bonding with other skinheads and to alcohol consumption, specifically the consumption of beer. When all three of

these factors are present violent responses to provocation are likely. Hamm describes these acts of drunken violence as "berserking" (1993: 192). In short, Hamm argues that skinheads' constant exposure to virulent messages of racism and violence, combined with social bonding with other skinheads and copious consumption of alcohol, leads to violent acts when the skinheads are provoked.

The emphasis Hamm places on white supremacist values in his explanation of skinhead violence is based on several questionable assumptions. He suggests the skinhead subculture underwent a radical transformation after reaching American shores. "Fading quickly from the subculture is the pageantry of the early British and American skinheads – the shaved heads, the swastika and other symbols of the subculture. And in their place has come a caricature of Order leader Robert Mathews" (1993: 131). While it may seem unfair to take Hamm to task since he was one of the first American academics to explore the American skinhead subculture, his assertions are highly questionable. If individuals abandon visual and symbolic cues that identify them as members of a subculture, should they still be considered part of that subculture, or have they become something else? Other studies have not suggested the wholesale rejection or reinterpretation of skinhead style that Hamm alludes to. In fact, some studies have indicated just the opposite, and cited the refusal of many racist skinheads to heed repeated calls to abandon their distinctive visual style and become covert operatives blending in with the rest of society (Smith, 2000; Simon, 2005).

Another problematic assumption made by Hamm was that the nature of the skinhead subculture was altered by exposure to the adult white supremacy movement, and that skinhead violence could be linked to that change. This is problematic for several reasons. The violent nature of the skinhead subculture was established in the 1960's and the youth who became involved with the subculture in North America would have been aware of its violent aspect. It also assumes that being a young white supremacist inherently involves violent behavior. In his study of a youth-oriented racist group in Detroit called the Death's-Head Strike Group, Raphael Ezekiel made the following observation. "While the group took great pride in calling itself "street-active," there seems to have been little violence" (1995: 151). The members of the Death's-Head Strike Group were young racists, but they were not skinheads. The fact that this group showed little proclivity toward violence illustrates the problematic nature of causal explanations linking the influence of the white supremacy movement and violence. The question then becomes are the racist skinheads violent because they are involved with the white supremacy movement, or are they violent because they are skinheads? The willingness of skinheads of all ideological stripes to engage in violence is well documented, suggesting that violence might be viewed as a product of the skinhead subculture (Christensen, 1994; Young and Craig, 1997; Finnegan, 1998; Wooden and Blazak, 2001).

Hamm's claims that youths become skinheads to pursue a racist agenda are also open to question. In a contrasting finding, Steven Baron (1997) argued that the skinheads that he studied did not constitute a terrorist youth subculture,

describing them as "street crime skinheads" whose ". . . variable racism appears to be an incidental factor in their everyday street crime activities" (1997: 150). In addition, the fact that some skinheads are involved in the street-level distribution of methamphetamine and other for-profit criminal activities raises questions about the strong distinction Hamm makes between skinhead crews and other types of gangs (Finnegan, 1998; Shafer and Navarro, 2003; Shelden, Tracy and Brown, 2004).

Emery Smith – Skinheads as a Subculture of Action

Emery Smith has argued that the influence of adult white supremacy groups on skinheads had been overstated in prior research. Smith argued that the parallel development of anti-racist skinhead groups with many of the same subcultural values suggested that the subculture had internal values beyond those of the white supremacy movement. He also argued that adult racist groups seek to exploit racist skinheads, but have had little success maintaining control over them. The following quote from a Ku Klux Klan leader illustrates the tension between skinheads and members of adult white supremacy groups. "Most of [the skinheads] are just looking for trouble. That's their idea of a good time, trouble. It don't help the movement to be a trouble maker for its own sake" (quoted in Smith, 2000: 123).

Building on David Moore's research on Australian skinheads, Smith offers an alternative explanation of skinhead behavior. Moore argued that the members of skinhead crews constituted action sets, small groups with close social ties who were in constant pursuit of excitement, "characterized by fighting,

heavy drinking and possibly meetings with the opposite sex" (Moore, 1994: 29). Moore also stresses the role of subcultural values and expectations among skinheads. "Skinhead authenticity has two essential components: the correct visual presentation of self and satisfactory performance in subcultural modes of action" (1994: 57).

Smith argued that Moore's constructs provide a better explanation of the behavior of American skinheads than theories that stressed the importance of influences external to the subculture. He also argues that racist skinheads have different motivations than adult white supremacists. "The combination of fighting, drinking, sex and story telling combined with changing venues, necessary to avoid harassment by authorities and to ensure a steady supply of new participants, keep the subculture alive. In other words, skinheads are motivated by culture; adult racists depend on ideology" (2000: 133). Smith directly contrasted his findings with Hamm's and argued that Hamm overemphasized the influence of adult white supremacists, while underemphasizing the importance of the values of the skinhead subculture.

The action-based model of skinhead behavior depicts skinhead violence as a direct function of involvement in the subculture. Violence is central to skinhead identity. "A skinhead cannot claim to be a 'skin' if he does not fight" (Moore, 1994: 66). Moore describes skinhead violence as ritualistic in nature, a symbolic display of subcultural values. When a skinhead perceives a challenge or a provocation, a violent response reinforces his skinhead identity to himself, to other skinheads and to members of the public.

Moore and Smith see the quest for excitement as being of central importance for a skinhead. Reputation in the subculture is based on involvement in exciting events, such as fights. "If an individual engages in many fights, drinks a lot of beer, and has been the hero of stories involving sexual exploits, others will hang out with him in hopes of having exciting stories to tell" (Smith, 2000: 97-98). Smith suggests that this emphasis on action is what maintains the existence of the subculture over time. Stories of previous exciting events establish the values and expectations of the subculture for new participants.

Smith's explanation of skinhead violence is in line with other research that suggests that violence is an integral part of the skinhead subculture (Baron, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997; Wooden and Blazak, 2001). It is also in line with research that suggests that a large amount of skinhead violence is opportunistic, "thrill-seeking" behavior (Watts, 2001; Wooden and Balzak, 2001). However, there are several problems with Smith's explanation.

The idea of subcultural values and expectations promoting violent behavior draws heavily from the subculture of violence model. Traditional subculture of violence theory assumes a closed system, people trapped by poverty or other factors, in a restricted social milieu. These environments are characterized by limited economic and social options, and credible threats to survival (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967; Anderson, 1999). Since most people are not born into the skinhead subculture, the individuals who become involved are choosing to participate. This element of self-selection raises questions about the sort of people who are attracted to this type of subculture. The skinhead

subculture may just attract people with violent tendencies, and thus skinhead violence could be seen simply as a product of the type of people who choose to be skinheads.

Another problem with the subculture of action model is the focus on the need for action to keep the subculture going, or "alive" as Smith describes it (2000: 133). Both Moore and Smith's arguments imply that the behavior of skinheads can be attributed in part to the need of the skinhead subculture to remain "alive." This is a teleological argument. It explains skinhead violence by postulating that a lack of such violence would threaten the continued existence of the subculture. This is a proposition that cannot be tested as no individual act of skinhead violence is committed with the expressed purpose of maintaining the subculture over time.

Stephen Baron – Skinheads as a Street Subculture

In "Canadian Male Street Skinheads: Street Gang or Street Terrorists" Stephen Baron (1997) considered the utility of Hamm's terrorist model for explaining the behaviors of a crew of skinheads in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Baron found that the crew did not comprise a terrorist youth subculture. He noted that although they held racist views they showed little interest in actively becoming involved in white supremacist activities. Some indicated a belief that involvement would achieve nothing and only get them in trouble with the law, while others felt that the adult white supremacists might exploit them.

Baron labeled the crew as "street crime" skinheads because they engaged in a large amount of criminal activity. "When asked to describe their daily

activities, the respondents inevitably described the twin activities of getting drunk and/or stoned and 'doing crime,' much of which included violent activities" (1997: 144). These skinheads engaged in a large amount of economically motivated crime such as robbery and theft, and a large amount of violence, but relatively little racially motivated violence. Baron suggests that this may have been due in part to a lack of interaction with members of minority groups. However, he also notes that on the rare occasions that conflicts with minorities did occur they were usually "a matter of money or drugs" (1997: 142).

The members of the crew had been exposed to a variety of negative situations at home and in school and most had been living on the streets for a considerable length of time. Baron argues that these factors come together to increase the likelihood of violent behavior. "Together, the prior victimization and the unfavorable living circumstances would seem to suggest that the skinheads would be prone to angry aggression" (1997: 139).

Violence, when it was not motivated by an economic motive, was described as a form of retributive justice, a response to being "slighted or harmed" by another person (1997: 140). Baron also noted that the skinhead crew "appeared to encourage and support violence as a tool of dispute settlement" by praising violent behavior (1997: 141). The crew's collective involvement in group fights also indicated a high degree of peer support for violent behavior.

While Baron's model provides some important insight into the violent behavior of the skinheads he studied, it is relatively undeveloped as violence was

not the main focus of his research. For example, while he differentiates between group and personal fights, he does not discuss the role of other crew members in the personal fights. Are they present? Do they watch? Do they participate?

It is also difficult to draw more general conclusions about skinhead violence from this research. It is likely that there were several important forces shaping the actions of the members of this group. One is the influence of the skinhead subculture, but a greater influence is likely to be the influence of life on the streets. This is problematic because it is very difficult to separate which behaviors are distinctly related to being a skinhead and which are a function of the harsh realities of life on the streets. In their study of street youth, Hagan and McCarthy (1997) argue that the behavior of street youth is directly tied to the conditions that led to being on the street and the reality of life on the street. In this context violence becomes at least partly a tool of survival, and street kids in general were found to be willing to resort to violence in a variety of situations. Baron acknowledges this issue, but does not resolve it by disaggregating the behaviors that were typical of all the street youths, from those that were exclusively practiced by the skinheads. This leaves this otherwise strong study mired in definitional issues. Is it really about skinheads or street kids? Are the behaviors reported a product of being the former, the latter, or a combination of both?

Skinhead Violence as Moralistic Behavior

The three theories presented above offer very different explanations of skinhead violence. However they also have some similarities. The most

important similarity may be the description of violent behavior as a response to provocation. The skinheads in Hamm's study claimed they never started a fight, and only fought to defend themselves and their values. The action model suggests that skinheads respond violently to threats to both their individual and collective skinhead identity (Moore, 1994). The skinheads in Baron's sample engaged in acts of "retributive justice" against people whom they felt had wronged them (Baron, 1997: 140). All of these reasons can be considered moralistic in the sense that they constitute a response to a perceived injustice. While it might seem strange to define the violence committed by racist skinheads as moralistic, in sociological terms this does indeed seem to be the case.

Some people might take offense at this characterization as a justification of skinhead violence, or as blaming the victim. However, it has long been argued in the criminological literature that violent subcultures have their own definitions of what constitutes deviant behavior (Sutherland, 1947; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967; Akers, 1977; Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). What constitutes a justification for violence varies between different groups and different social contexts. For skinheads even a passing glance may be construed as a challenge (Katz, 1988; Schafer and Navarro, 2003).

Donald Black's Theory of Conflict Management

Donald Black has suggested that much of what is considered to be violent crime in modern societies can be conceived as conflict management. "Much crime is moralistic and involves the pursuit of justice. . . To the degree that it defines or responds to the conduct of someone else – the victim – as deviant,

crime is social control" (Black, 1984: 1). Black's formulation seems to fit with the descriptions of skinhead violence as being provoked by others. This raises the larger question; can Black's theory of conflict management provide the framework for an alternative explanation for skinhead violence?

Donald Black's paradigm of pure sociology is a theoretical approach that stresses, "a multidimensional conception of social space - a geometry of social life - with vertical, horizontal, symbolic, corporate, and normative dimensions. These dimensions incorporate and harness the explanatory power of diverse theories and variables" (Black, 1995: 851). The specific nature of a violent act, or any other form of conflict management, can be explained by examining the structural relations surrounding the event, or in Blackian terms, its location and direction in social space.

A major focus of Black's theory is the mechanics of social control. "[S]ocial control is the normative aspect of social life, or the definition of deviant behavior and the response to it" (Black, 1976: 2). The definition of deviant behavior is any action that is subject to social control (Black, 1976). While at first this might seem like circular reasoning, the Blackian approach serves to broaden our conception of the types of behaviors that might be considered to be social control. Rather than embracing a narrow view of law and popular morality as the sole definers of deviance, Black identifies both the ability to define deviance, and the ability to engage in social control, as being in the hands of individuals, groups and institutions (Black, 1998).

A significant aspect of Black's approach to social control is that it defines social control itself as the dependent variable (Black, 1984; 1998). This is based on the recognition that disputes or conflicts with similar structural characteristics will often have similar outcomes. By conceiving a conflict's location and direction in social space as a set of independent variables it becomes possible to predict and explain outcomes, that is to say, it becomes possible to predict and explain the form and quantity of social control that is likely to be employed in a given case.

Forms of Social Control

"A form of social control is a mechanism by which a person or group expresses a grievance" (Black, 1998: 5). When people are involved in conflicts with others they may handle these conflicts in a wide variety of ways. Black argues that all the ways in which people handle their conflicts fall into one of five categories which Black describes as "the elementary forms of conflict management." The five forms are self-help, avoidance, negotiation, settlement and toleration (1998: 74).

Self-help. Black argues that much of the behavior socially defined as deviance is actually conflict management. He describes violent or aggressive informal social control as self-help. "[S]elf-help . . . addresses the conditions under which people aggressively pursue their own grievances, such as by unilaterally admonishing or injuring their antagonists" (1998: 5-6). Like other forms of social control, the nature of self-help varies with its social structure, or its location and direction in social space.

Black characterizes self-help practiced between parties of relatively equal status as vengeance (1998: 75). In addition to the relative equality of the principal parties, vengeance most frequently occurs when the parties involved do not have strong social ties to each other. Black argues that both a lack of relational ties and a lack of cultural ties between parties can promote the use of vengeance.

In addition to a lack of social ties, Black argues that vengeance is more widely practiced between individuals who are functionally independent: those who do not rely on one another for survival or prosperity. Black explains the reason for this quite succinctly: "People more readily kill people they can do without" (1998: 77).

Another factor that can promote the use of vengeance is immobility. Black argues that people who have limited mobility are more likely to engage in vengeance than those who are able to escape contact with an offending party. Close proximity forces parties with grievances into frequent contact which increases the chance of the conflict escalating. Proximity may also create a situation where an individual's behavior comes under close scrutiny and reputations can be made and lost based on how offenses are handled: "A concern with honor – which typically dictates forceful retaliation for many offenses, including revenge slayings – presupposes an audience who will know about the affairs of others and whose opinions matter. In settings where this concern exists, people demonstrate their worth and integrity to their fellows by refusing to tolerate mistreatment" (Baumgartner, 1988: 95).

The last factor that Black argues promotes vengeance is organization. He argues that in conflicts between organized groups are more likely to involve a high degree of violent vengeance than conflicts between individuals. Wars and feuds to tend to be much more destructive than conflicts between individuals could ever be.

Other researchers working with Black's concepts have noted that age is an additional factor that increases the likelihood of self-help being used to redress a grievance. This is supported by the fact that in the United States acts of violence such as homicide and aggravated assault are disproportionably committed by people in their teens and twenties (Miethe and McCorkle, 2001). In her study of social control in suburbia, Baumgartner (1988) found that aggressive forms of self-help such as violence and vandalism were much more frequently employed by young people. Part of the reason for this may be that in modern societies young people often manifest a greater concern about person honor or reputation than adults do. Young people generally lack access to the sources of status available to adults as a result of their subordinate position in the social structure of modern societies. As a result, they place greater importance on personal honor as a source of status among their peers (Cooney, 1998; Philips and Cooney, 2005).

In his test of Black's model of vengeance, Philips (2003) only found empirical support for two of the factors Black suggests promote the use of vengeance, relational distance and functional independence, both of which varied directly with violence. Philips suggests that the lack of support for Black's

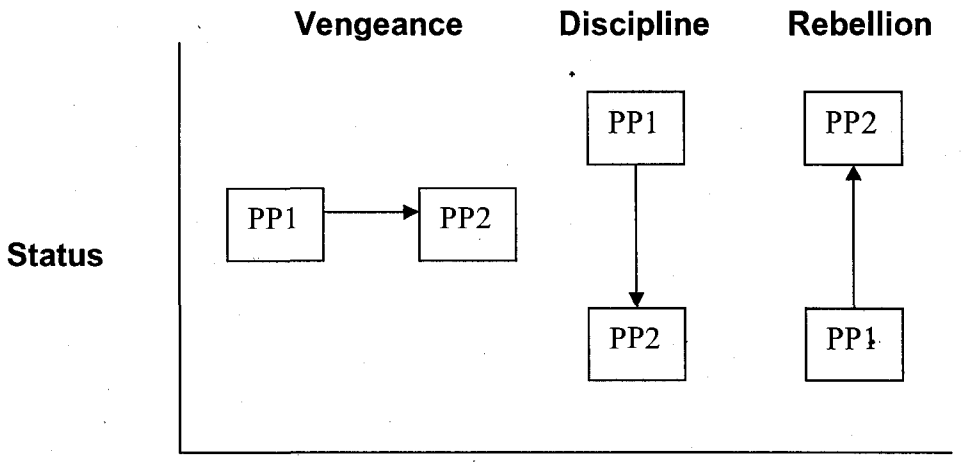
other propositions may be a product of the difficulty of accurately measuring variables such as equality, and the focus on a specific type of conflict.

A different set of circumstances promotes other varieties of self-help, most notably discipline and rebellion. Discipline and rebellion are immediately distinguished from vengeance in that they do not occur between parties of relatively equal status: "Discipline is downward self-help; rebellion is upward self-help" (1998: 78). The severity of discipline and rebellion is further increased by the presence of vertical segmentation, a hierarchal arrangement of people that systematically defines the relative status of parties. Examples of vertical segmentation would be military ranks or social classes.

Another difference between the social structure of vengeance and that of discipline and rebellion is that where vengeance tends to be seen between parties that are functionally independent, discipline and rebellion are more likely to be present in situations where there is functional unity between the involved parties: "They are likely to participate in the same enterprise . . . Their roles differ, but their lives intertwine. Socially distant, they are nevertheless bound together for the long term" (1998: 79).

As with vengeance, the severity of discipline and rebellion tends to increase as the social distance between the involved parties increases. Another commonality is that discipline and rebellion tend to be a product of immobility. People who are unable to avoid an offending party must either suffer the grievance or act to deal with it.

Fig 2.1: Varieties of Self-Help



PP: Principal Party in a conflict

Avoidance. Avoidance is a form of conflict management that involves reducing or eliminating interactions with an offending party (Baumgartner, 1988; Black, 1998). Avoidance is most common in situations where the involved parties are relatively equal and are functionally independent. Parties who are subject to authority structures are unlikely to successful avoid superiors. Interdependent parties are unlikely to be able to curtail interactions without undesirable consequences, such as loss of income.

Other factors that promote the use of avoidance are social fluidity, social fragmentation and individuation (Baumgartner, 1988). Social life is considered to be fluid when social relationships tend to be short term affairs. In modern societies the decline of traditional ways of life has led to social fragmentation: "With the modernization of society, relationships become increasingly emaciated, and avoidance proliferates" (Black, 1998: 81). Lastly, while organizations do in

some instances avoidance as a strategy for managing conflict, it is more frequently practiced by individuals.

Negotiation. Negotiation occurs when the two sides in a conflict discuss their grievances and come up with a mutually acceptable solution. Negotiations are most often seen when the parties in conflict are of relatively equal status, when there are cross-linkages that decrease the effective relational distance between the parties, when the parties involved are relatively homogeneous in their characteristics, and when the two sides are mutually accessible to one another. Black also argues that negotiation is more frequently practiced between organizations then between individuals.

Settlement. Settlement involves the intervention of a nonpartisan third party in a conflict. To be a true settlement agent a third party cannot have a bias towards either side in the conflict. Third party settlement agents may be of the same social status, as in the case of a person who is friendly with both parties interceding in a conflict, but they are more often parties with higher status than the parties in dispute. Settlement is likely to be more authoritative when the status of the Settlement agent is greater than the status of the disputants and the settlement agent has no rational ties to the disputants. If the settlement agent culturally distant from the disputants this will also tend to promote authoritative settlement. Because settlement agents often representatives of organizations, police officers or judges, for example, Black argues that settlement behavior is often characterized by organizational asymmetry. The structure is asymmetrical

because while the settlement agent is often the representative of an organization, the disputants are most commonly individuals.

Toleration. Tolerance is inaction, the choice not to respond to an offense. "Toleration is the most common response of aggrieved people everywhere" (Black, 1998: 88). Toleration occurs under a wide variety of disparate social conditions, the most important of which for the present study is inequality. When the aggrieved party in a conflict is the offending party's social inferior, toleration is a likely outcome.

Explaining Conflict Outcomes

Black's approach to explaining conflict has several advantages. It goes beyond explanations that focus on violent tendencies and motivations to examine violent acts as objects of study in their own right. Black's approach also goes further than other structural approaches used by criminologists to explain deviant or criminal acts. In most structural explanations of deviant or criminal behavior, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime or Felson's (1998) routine activities theory, the outcome variable is dichotomous, did the deviant behavior occur or did it not occur? Black's approach allows for a wide range of possible outcomes breaking down the artificial distinctions between various kinds of behavior. It addresses the larger question, when is one form of conflict management employed instead of another?

Black argues that the use of specific forms of conflict management is linked to the social structure of the conflict. Different conflict structures will promote different conflict management outcomes. Thus, the form of conflict

management used can be conceived of as a dependent variable (1984; 1998). The structural elements of the conflict that determine its location and direction in social space are the independent variables. By viewing conflicts across cases, links between combinations of these independent variables and particular conflict outcomes can be observed. Some of these independent variables I have already mentioned in the discussion of the forms of conflict management. Among the most important of those are: relational distance, cultural distance, equality, functional independence, immobility and organization. Other important dependent variables include the normative status, or respectability, of the parties involved in a conflict, and the social location, social ties and actions of third parties (Black, 1976; 1998).

Normative Status. Normative status, or respectability, is a product of an individual or group's history of interaction with various forms of authority, most notably law (Black, 1976). For example, an individual with a long criminal record is considered less respectable than a person who has never been in trouble with the law. Perceptions about whole categories of people can lead to all members of a category being considered less respectable and in turn being subject to a greater degree of legal attention than people viewed as respectable. Unfavorable experience with the law may cause people to engage in a greater amount of informal conflict management (Black, 1976; 1998; Cooney, 1998). People who lack respectability, such as career criminals, are likely to eschew formal authority in favor of informal social control in even the most serious conflicts (Black, 1976).

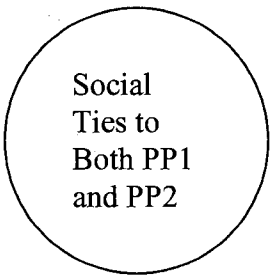
Third Parties. A third party is simply anyone other than the disputants who has knowledge of a conflict (Black, 1998). There is wide-ranging support in the criminological and sociological literature for the idea that third parties influence the outcome of conflicts whether as an audience or as participants (Lofland, 1969; Hepburn, 1973; Luckenbill, 1977; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Felson, Ribner and Siegel, 1984; Tedeschi and Felson, 1994). This research provides support for Black's argument that the presence of third parties significantly changes the structure of a conflict, and thus third parties play an important role in determining the form and quantity of conflict management employed in a given case (Black 1979; 1984; 1998).

Black argues that the social characteristics of third parties, and especially their relations with disputants, determine the most likely nature of their intervention. Third parties have the potential to increase or lessen the severity of a conflict. As mentioned earlier, third parties can act as settlement agents, helping to bring an end to a conflict. They can also aid the principal parties in their efforts to resolve a conflict by acting as negotiators. When third parties have stronger ties to one party in a conflict they often take sides. Third party supporters can serve to inflame a dispute, making it much more serious than it might have been originally (Black, 1998; Cooney, 1998; Philips and Cooney, 2005).

Partisanship. Partisans are third parties who take sides in a dispute, as opposed to third parties who attempt to offer unbiased assistance. Black (1998) argues that third parties may gravitate towards one side of a conflict based on

their relational or cultural ties to that side: "Partisanship is a function of social closeness to one side and social remoteness from the other" (1998: 126). In a process that Black calls social gravitation, the two sides attract third parties "with a strength proportional to their nearness to them and their distance from the opponent" (1998: 126). When third parties have ties to both of the disputants their degree of partisanship is likely to be relatively weak. If a third party has equal ties to both disputants they are likely to be nonpartisans.

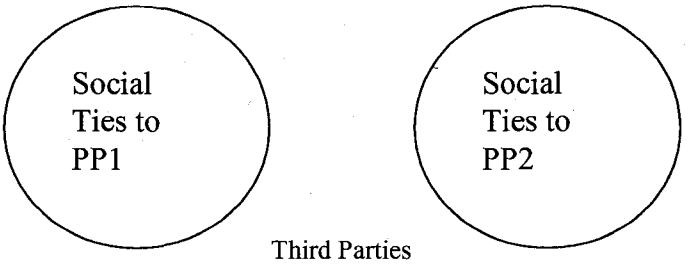
Figure 2.2: Conditions that Promote Non-partisan Behavior



Third Parties

Nonpartisans are likely to behave in a similar manner towards both disputants, and may try to help end the conflict. However, when the potential partisans only have ties to one of the disputants, they are likely to become strong partisans of that party.

Figure 2.3: Conditions that Promote Strong Partisanship



Another characteristic of disputants that can engender partisanship is social status. Black argues that those of higher social status attract partisans by their very nature. In addition, he suggests that these partisans themselves add to the status of the disputant whose side they take, serving to increase the attractiveness of that side to other potential partisans: "Partisanship is a joint function of the social superiority of one side and the social inferiority of the other" (1998: 127). The factors that define social superiority vary greatly between cultures, but in any situation where the disputants can be ranked on the same hierarchical scale a statement about their relative status can be made. In conflicts between parties whose relative status can be assessed we would expect the party of relatively higher status to evoke a greater degree of partisanship from third parties. Partisanship is strengthened when there is solidarity between third parties and one side in a conflict. Solidarity is seen when people have extensive ties to one another including close relational ties, shared culture, and mutual interdependence (Senechal de la Roche, 2001).

Collective Violence. The involvement of strong partisans in a conflict can lead to incidents of collective violence. Senechal de la Roche (2001) argues that: "The collectivization of violence is a direct function of strong partisanship" (2001: 140). Strong partisanship, as mentioned previously, occurs when third parties support one side over another in a conflict, and when there is solidarity between the partisans and the party they support. Senechal de la Roche (1996) identifies four variables that she argues vary directly with collective violence. These are relational distance, cultural distance, functional independence and inequality. The first three of these are factors identified by Black (1998) as being structural conditions that give rise to vengeance. However, where Black argued that vengeance was most common between equals, Senechal de la Roche (1996) argues that the collective violence will be most severe in conflicts characterized by a high degree of inequality between the principal parties. She argues that collective violence in often at its most brutal when it is directed downward against a lower status second party.

The form that collective violence takes varies according to three factors. The first factor is the degree to which a conflict has a polarized structure. The second factor is whether the deviant behavior that gave rise to the conflict is relatively finite or whether it is ongoing. The last factor is the degree of organization of the aggrieved party and their supporters. For example, rioting is characterized by a largely disorganized group who view themselves as similar to one another but distinct from those who they are rioting against and who are galvanized into collective action over a specific issue. In contrast, terrorism is an

organized reaction to an ongoing grievance felt by a group who see themselves as distinct from those who are perceived to be the source of the grievance (Senechal de la Roche, 1996).

Collective Liability. Black (1984) defines collective liability as a logic, "whereby all members of a family or other group are accountable for the conduct of their fellows" (1984: 3). This is the opposite of individual liability where only an individual who has committed an offense is held responsible. Some forms of collective violence are based in the logic of collective liability, including rioting and terrorism (Senechal de la Roche, 1996). Collective liability has also been identified as playing a role in ongoing conflicts in situations ranging from blood feuds in nineteenth-century Corsica (Gould, 2000) to gang-related violence in America's inner cities (Cooney, 1998; Philips, 2003).

Skinhead Violence as Conflict Management

The research on skinheads suggests that skinheads often engage in violence as a response to provocation, although in many cases the acts of provocation may be extremely minor. Hamm (1993) argued that skinheads respond to threats and challenges to their values. Moore (1994) and Smith (2000) both suggest that skinheads respond violently to threats to both their individual and collective skinhead identity. Baron's research indicated that skinheads engage in violence as a form of retributive justice. Such violence is often identified as being the fault of a person who has wronged a skinhead. In these cases the parties are generally known to each other and the violence is a product of their past interactions (Baron, 1997). Other research has similarly

suggested that skinheads will often treat a look or a comment as a challenge, and these situations can escalate to violence (Katz, 1988; Blee, 2002; Schafer and Navarro, 2003). These accounts suggest that skinhead violence is moralistic in nature, and constitutes a form of conflict management.

Applying Black's paradigm to the study of skinheads has several advantages. Firstly, the focus on observable factors helps to cut through the clutter of ideological, subcultural, personality and background factors that have given central billing in prior explanations of skinhead violence. Secondly, using this approach I consider factors that have been shown to have explanatory power in other settings. While some approaches to the study of subcultures stress the distinctiveness of a specific subculture and its values, approaching such a study using a conflict management framework helps to identify similarities of behavior across groups as well as differences.

Alternative Explanations

In this study I employ a model based on Black's theories to examine the social structure of skinhead violence. However, I also consider the utility of a variety of other possible factors for explaining racist skinhead violence. Based on a review of the literature I have identified five factors that have been used to describe skinhead violence in previous research. These are; white supremacist ideology, subcultural values, background factors, societal change and alcohol consumption.

White Supremacist Ideology. This has been perhaps the most pervasive and confounding factor in research on skinheads in North America. It is also one

of the most difficult to assess. Adding to the problem is the self-stigmatizing nature of the racist skinhead subculture. For many people the idea of wearing a swastika or Ku Klux Klan patch is so offensive that they cannot believe anyone would wear such a symbol without a strong commitment to its meaning. However, there is consistent support in the literature for the argument that skinheads vary greatly in their level of ideological sophistication (Levin and McDevitt, 1993; Hamm, 1993; Wooden, 1995; Baron, 1997; Smith, 2000; Levin 2002). While some skinheads seem to have a strong grasp of neo-Nazi and White supremacist ideology, others seem to know very little about such things.

A fundamental problem with linking skinhead violence to white supremacist ideology is the fact that many of the racist skinheads' victims are whites (Baron, 1997; Smith, 2000; Blee, 2002). Some researchers have suggested that white supremacist ideology is only one element of a larger culture of violence that exists among racist skinheads (Blee, 2002). Others have argued that white supremacist ideology plays a relatively minor role in skinhead violence (Baron, 1997; Smith, 2000).

Many descriptions of skinhead violence look at the victimization of a specific group such as a racial minority or homosexuals. However, such accounts are intended to draw attention to a specific type of victimization. When viewed across cases skinhead violence seems to encompass a wide variety of additional categories of adversaries and victims.

I am not in any way discounting skinhead violence against racial and ethnic minorities, or violence against homosexuals. Such violence has been well

documented. However, it is important to consider the wide range of sources that indicate that a large amount of skinhead violence does not involve victims of other races, ethnicities or sexual orientations (Baron, 1997; SPLC, 1998[1]; Dirmann, 1999; Smith, 2000; Blee, 2002). Emery Smith's fieldwork with skinheads yielded the following observation about the nature of skinhead violence. "Ask a racist skinhead who they fight with, and they will say Jews, Blacks, anti-racist skins, etc. Observe who they fight with and it becomes obvious that most of the violence is internecine--between different gangs of racist skinheads and between skinheads in the same crew" (Smith, 2000: 91-2).

While Smith's research suggests that racist skinheads fight mostly among themselves, other research indicates a variety of additional opponents. As mentioned earlier, there is often conflict between racist and anti-racist skinheads (Hamm, 1993; Finnegan, 1998; Wood, 1999; Wooden and Blazak, 2001; Blee, 2002). In addition, skinheads may clash with members of other youth subcultures, punk rockers, for example (Baron, 1989; 1997). Several researchers have suggested that racist skinheads are most likely to fight with youth who inhabit the same terrain as the skinheads, and come into regular contact with them (Baron, 1997; Wooden and Blazak, 2001).

Subcultural Values. Several researchers have argued that skinhead violence can be linked to subcultural values that are, at least in part, separate from the ideology of the white supremacist movement (Smith, 2000; Blee, 2002). Some of the early research on skinheads defined racist skinheads as a separate phenomenon from other types of skinheads, stressing the importance of ideology

in creating skinhead identity (Hamm, 1993; Kleg, 1993). Other sources have suggested that there is much less difference between racist and anti-racist skinheads than one might expect (Christiansen, 1994; Leet et al, 2000; Blee, 2002). Kathleen Blee (2002) noted that constructing racist versus antiracist skinhead violence as a struggle between groups with conflicting ideological values was problematic:

> Violent confrontations between racist skinheads and self-defined "antiracist skinheads," in particular, can have an eerily fragile connection to ideology, as people move from racist to antiracist groups and back again, for reasons having less to do with politics than with shifting friendships or the availability of parties, drugs and alcohol (2002: 175).

Researchers have suggested that there is a fair amount of variability between the members of a subculture in the degree to which they may internalize the values of the subculture. Some members may internalize the values of the subculture while others may be involved because they feel loyalty towards the group or specific members (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1985). If this is true of the skinhead subculture, then Hamm's argument that skinheads act violently to defend their values and Smith's argument that attributes violence to the defense of skinhead identity both become problematic.

Another issue with attributing skinhead violence to subcultural values is the fact that becoming a skinhead is a matter of choice. The violent imagery of the skinhead subculture may simply attract people with violent tendencies. The model of collective deviance as a gathering of those with preexisting deviant tendencies has had some supporters among influential criminologists (Glueck and Glueck, 1950; Yablonsky, 1962; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

Family Background Factors. Some researchers have argued that family dysfunction is the major reason that youths become violent skinheads (Korem, 1994; Baron, 1997). This position is in line with the self-control theory of delinquency (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). This theory states that an individual's level of self-control is set in early childhood and remains relatively constant throughout life. Low self-control is the result of poor family socialization, and makes an individual more prone to committing deviant acts.

Researchers have identified some skinheads as coming from broken or troubled homes (Korem, 1994; Wooden, 1995; Baron, 1997; Leet, Rush and Smith, 2000). However, this does not seem to be true in all cases. In fact, much of the research on skinheads suggests that there is a large degree of variation in home-life characteristics of skinheads (Langer, 1990; Kleg, 1993; Moore, 1993; Hamm, 1993; Young and Craig, 1997; Smith, 2000).

Societal Change. Some observers have suggested that white youth become violent racist skinheads because they are subjected to a distinct set of pressures stemming from economic hardship (Van Biema, 1993; Zellner, 1995). While this conclusion seems to make intuitive sense, historically the connection between economic downturn and the growth of racist groups is much more elusive. Far-right mobilization in North America has occurred in both in times adversity and prosperity (Lipset and Raab, 1978; Aho, 1990).

The economic model assumes that skinheads are drawn from the social classes that are most immediately affected by the decline of manufacturing jobs (Zellner, 1995; Braun, 1997). However, there is a relatively consistent finding

among researchers that skinheads in North America come from diverse economic backgrounds (Langer, 1990; Lopez and Mirande, 1990; Kleg, 1993; Hamm, 1993; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997). The common misconception that skinhead groups are entirely made up of young males from blue-collar backgrounds may be partly due to the emphasis skinheads put on being "working-class." Some researchers have noted that among skinheads "working-class" seems to refer to a set of values rather than origins in a specific level of the economic strata (Young and Craig, 1997; Lopes, 2001).

Other researchers have argued the skinheads perceive a threat from cultural changes. Skinheads feel as if the "real America" a place largely defined by the cultural dominance of White males, is rapidly disappearing and are quick to blame social gains made by minorities, women and homosexuals for the change (Langer, 1990; Kleg, 1993; Finnegan, 1998; Blazak, 1999; Blazak, 2001). Randy Blazak has argued that in the case of cultural change threats to status and economic wellbeing do not have to be directly experienced. The perception that such threats exist is enough to create anxiety in young males (Blazak, 1999).

While models implicating economic and cultural change may provide explanations for involvement in the skinhead subculture, linking these factors to skinhead violence is more difficult. Hamm presented the notion that skinheads were archconservatives who were tightly bonded to traditional social values. He argued that their violence was a reaction to the perceived threats to those values (Hamm, 1993). Blazak countered that anomie, a moral confusion driven by the

fragmentation of the existing social order, may be what causes skinheads to bond themselves to conservative values (Blazak, 1995). The implications of these two conceptions are very different. The former explanation suggests that skinhead violence is committed to defend deeply held values, the latter suggests that it involves lashing out angrily at a confusing world.

All of the preceding factors share a common trait. Their influence should be relatively constant over time in any given racist skinhead. Therefore we would not look to variation in any of these factors to explain variation in violent behavior by an individual skinhead. In contrast, the consumption of alcohol is a variable factor that may be observed to be present or absent in any given conflict.

Alcohol. Racist skinheads often present their subculture as a positive one, in which healthy behaviors are encouraged and drug use is not permitted (Hamm, 1993; Kinsella, 1994). However, skinheads do not consider alcohol a drug, and heavy consumption of alcohol, especially beer, is a major component of the skinhead subculture (Hamm, 1993; Blazak, 1995; Young and Craig, 1997; Smith, 2000). Hamm (1995) argued that heavy consumption of beer was an important causal factor contributing to skinhead violence. A problem with Hamm's argument may lie in his focus on whether or not alcohol was consumed prior to racial assaults. While Hamm examines the general frequency of use of other drugs, he does not offer any information on the general frequency of alcohol use among the skinheads. Without knowing how frequently the skinheads engaged in heavy consumption of beer it is difficult to assess the causal relevance of this behavior to violent acts. If, as much of the research

suggests, skinheads are often intoxicated on beer then the consumption of beer could be correlated with most skinhead activities, especially if it is considered as a causal precursor to any given behavior.

Summary and Predictions

In the research on racist skinheads there are many assumptions about why they are violent. Many of these assumptions have been influenced by the portrayal of skinheads in the media and information provided by watchdog organizations. Skinheads are violent because they are racist. They are violent because they come from broken homes. They are violent because they are afflicted with anomie arising from rapid social change and the loss of white male privilege. The interesting thing about these assumptions is they are not based of research on skinhead violence. Instead, theories about why youths become skinheads have often been used as proxy explanations of skinhead violence. This might explain why many of the common assumptions seem to be at odds with the available evidence. For example, the proposition that skinheads are violent because they are racist cannot explain the large number of whites who are victims of skinhead violence.

There are sociological theories that look more explicitly at skinhead violence. Hamm (1993) argued that a mix of racism, the influence of adult white supremacist organizations, social bonding with other skinhead, and alcohol consumption set the stage for skinheads to react violently when their values were challenged. Smith (2000) argued that violence was central to skinhead identity and that it created excitement, attracting new people to the subculture and thus

maintaining its existence over time. Baron (1997) described skinhead violence as moralistic street justice directed at individuals and groups who had wronged a skinhead. Both Hamm and Baron describe racist skinhead violence as often being a response to a real or perceived provocation. This conception is supported by other research (Katz, 1988; Moore, 1994; Schafer and Navarro, 2003) suggesting that skinhead violence can be considered as a form of moralistic behavior.

Black's structural theory of conflict management provides an alternative method for explaining skinhead violence. By looking beyond the role of violent tendencies and motivations, Black provides a framework for explaining the occurrence of violent acts. If skinhead violence is a moralistic response to deviant behavior, then it is the product of a conflict that can be described in terms of the relationships between the parties involved. This allows for a comparative analysis. The conflicts that are handled violently can be compared with those that are handled nonviolently and structural factors conducive to violent conflict handling can be identified.

Black argues that the use of violent self-help is most likely when the parties in a conflict are relatively equal in status, relationally distant, culturally dissimilar, functionally independent and spatially close. Using these factors we can predict that skinhead violence should be at its most severe when directed at parties who are strangers to the skinheads, who are very different culturally, members of racial and ethnic minorities for example, and who the skinheads come into physical contact with. Early descriptions of skinhead violence in Great

Britain often focus on violence against Pakistani and Indian immigrants, referred to as "Paki-bashing" (Pearson, 1976). Researchers suggested that the reason that these groups were specifically targeted for violence was that they had moved into working class areas, but kept to themselves and established their own cultural communities. As a result these immigrants had weak relational and cultural ties to the communities they now inhabited. They shared the same spatial locations as the skinheads, but were seen as outsiders who didn't belong there. As a result even the smallest grievances could escalate to serious violence (Pearson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979).

Black's theory of partisanship predicts that skinhead violence will be most common and severe when a skinhead has strong partisan support. We would expect strong partisanship to be a common occurrence in conflicts with outsiders because the combination of relational, cultural, and organizational ties between the members of a skinhead crew should promote solidarity. We would expect to see much less partisanship in internal crew conflicts as it should be limited by the existence of cross-cutting ties between the crewmembers.

There has been little study of the role of third parties in skinhead violence. Hamm uses social bonding among skinheads as part of his explanation of skinhead violence but it is unclear how such bonding influenced cases of actual violence since the majority of examples he offers describe one-on-one violence (Hamm, 1993). Other researchers have noted that skinheads often engage in collective violence (Baron, 1997; Blee, 2002) and that joining a fight to aid a friend is considered to be appropriate skinhead behavior (Baron, 1997).

If the skinheads are largely motivated by the cause of white supremacy, the high level of solidarity we would expect to find among the members of racist skinhead crews should combine with an ongoing grievance against racial and ethnic minorities and lead to acts of collective violence against members of those groups. Such attacks would most likely be governed by the logic of collective liability in which any member of a group is viewed as any appropriate target.

In the next chapter I discuss the methodology of the current study. I evaluate the utility of various research methodologies for studying skinheads and identify some of the problems inherent in working with this type of population. A research definition for skinheads is established and I describe how I collected the data for the current study and how I operationalized the variables for the analysis of conflicts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to examine the dynamics of conflict management in racist skinhead groups. This is an exploratory study aimed at examining the role of conflict structures in shaping conflict resolution. Every conflict has a specific structure, a set of relationships between the involved parties that can be described in terms of their distance, location and direction in social space. By comparing across cases, I can examine the ways in which conflict structures shape conflict outcomes.

Doing Research with Skinheads

Prior Research Approaches

Secondary Analysis. Much of the early work on skinheads in the North American context involved secondary analysis. These researchers drew their information from a variety of sources, but generally had little or no contact with actual skinheads. Instead they relied on the popular media, British research on skinheads, and publications from anti-racist activist groups as their primary sources.

In the 1993 book *Skinheads Shaved for Battle: A Cultural History of American Skinheads* Jack B. Moore presents an examination of the skinhead phenomena in America in the 1980's. Moore draws heavily on publications from anti-discrimination activist groups including the Southern Poverty Law Center

(SPLC), the Anti-defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL), and the Center for Democratic Renewal (CDR). This dependence on material from groups that promote a specific agenda and have a specific orientation to the issue of skinheads is problematic. Moore actually does try to avoid being too one-sided but his reliance on secondary sources makes objective analysis difficult. He has little material with which to balance out the claims of the watchdog groups and the sensational media stories. The book is essentially a long literature review that lays the groundwork for research to be done by others.

In *Countercultures* (1995) William Zellner argues that declining economic opportunity and downward social mobility were key factors for explaining the emergence of racist skinheads in the United States. However, his argument, while cogent, is built on fairly slim data, consisting of a few articles from the popular media, and publications from anti-discrimination activist groups including the SPLC and the ADL. In the end Zellner's lack of actual evidence to support his hypothesis undermines the credibility of his conclusions.

In the article Skinheads: *Manifestations of the Warrior Culture of the New Urban Tribes* (1999) Gregg W. Etter Sr. provides an overview of skinhead history and a description of contemporary American skinheads drawn from a variety of sources. While Etter Sr.'s article is interesting, it is really an overview for those who know nothing about skinheads as it is largely descriptive. Those more familiar with the subject might suggest that some of the information may be inaccurate, and that some important facts have been omitted. They might also

note that Etter Sr.'s article contributes no new information about skinheads or insight into their actions.

Emery Smith (2000) notes that only about half of the researchers he has met who are interested in skinheads or other far-right groups have directly observed or interacted with members of these groups. While there is an art to composing a coherent argument from diverse sources, sometimes it is better to go straight to the source. At this point we need to address the questions and controversies that exist regarding skinheads in a more direct manner.

Interviews with Skinheads. Most of the original research on skinheads in the United States has used data collected through interviews with skinheads. This technique allows researchers to address specific research questions without being limited by the scope of preexisting information (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996; Champion, 2000). The use of interviews also allows the researcher to collect additional information from the respondents, including background information (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).

In 1993, Mark Hamm's *American Skinheads: the Criminology and Control of Hate Crime* was the first academic book to feature a purposive study of racist skinheads in the United States. Hamm collected his own data via interviews, which allowed him to test a variety of hypotheses in a way that would not have been possible using secondary sources. Hamm based his study on interviews with 36 skinheads, as well as numerous additional sources. While Hamm's study was ambitious and comprehensive, it has several research design issues that may have affected his findings.

One central issue in Hamm's research is that fact that he never gives a clear definition of a skinhead prior to the discussion of his findings. He provides a extensive history of skinheads in both England and the United States, as well as reviewing media and law enforcement accounts of skinheads, but he never pins himself down to a single research definition. This plays out in his favor as his analysis develops and he identifies several types of skinheads with different characteristics. However, I suspect that even a fairly broad research definition would have excluded several of his respondents.

Another issue in Hamm's research is his use of multiple interviewing methodologies. He employed face to face interviews, phone interviews, written exchanges, and internet interviews. While he was admittedly working with a difficult population, the question arises, should these interviews be weighted equally? Extensive data were collected from some respondents, while others filled out a relatively restrictive questionnaire. Since he never had face to face interaction with many of the respondents, it is impossible to know if they represented themselves honestly. Some researchers have questioned the internal validity of Hamm's methods. Blazak (1995) points out that Hamm had no way of knowing if those who responded were actually skinheads, and brings up the possibility that some of the questionnaires were filled out by adult white-supremacists to promote a positive view of the white-supremacy movement.

Hamm's study was an important attempt to study a subculture that little was known about. However, many of his findings were not replicated in later

studies of skinheads. It is likely that the issues mentioned above provide a partial explanation for this.

In his book *Renegade Kids, Suburban Outlaws* (1995) Wayne Wooden looks at a cross section of youth subcultures in the United States. One of the groups he examines is skinheads. Wooden collected interviews from 32 skinheads and also used some case files from The California Youth Authority. Unlike Hamm, Wooden defines skinheads based on their appearance. Using a clear definition, allows Wooden to examine the ideological variations between skinheads without worrying about straying away from the object of study.

While Wooden's methodology has some advantages over Hamm's, it is not made entirely clear how the sample was selected or how the interviews were carried out. In addition, some of the findings that are central to his conclusions were based data collected via Lickert scales that offered quite restrictive response choices.

Stephen Baron's (1997) study of skinheads was part of a larger study of street youth. Baron used a definition based on appearance and on the respondent self-identifying as a skinhead. He also used a network sampling technique to gain further interviews through the skinheads he had already interviewed, which provided additional confirmation of the new respondent's identity as a skinhead.

The interviews were carried out on a one-on-one basis in mall food courts, and address a number of topics. "The interview itself contained a mix of forced-choice and open-ended items that focused on the youth's family, educational,

employment and criminal backgrounds, as well as on their political activities" (Baron, 1997: 132). Baron also had the advantage of having contact with non-skinhead street youth who could provide additional information about the behaviors of the skinheads.

While Baron's basic research design was methodologically sound, the issue of defining a skinhead rears its head again. The respondents in Baron's study dressed like skinheads, self-identified as skinheads, and were identified by other street youth as skinheads. But, I can not help but wonder about the relationship between these street skinheads and other non-street skinheads, something that is not discussed. Some of the behaviors manifested by members of this group do not seem to fit with what has been found in other studies. For example, the high levels of illegal drug use reported among members of this group are not found in most other studies of skinheads.

It is likely that there were several important forces shaping the actions of the members of this group. One is the influence of the skinhead subculture, but a greater influence is likely to be the influence of life on the streets. This is problematic because it is very difficult to separate which behaviors are distinctly related to a skinhead identity and which are a function of the harsh realities of life on the streets. In their study of street youth, Hagan and McCarthy (1997) argue that the behavior of street youth is directly tied to the conditions that led to being on the street and the reality of life on the street. In this context violence becomes at least partly a tool of survival, and street kids in general were found to be willing to resort to violence in a variety of situations. Baron acknowledges this issue, but

does not resolve it by disaggregating the behaviors that were typical of all the street youths, from those that were exclusively practiced by the skinheads. This leaves this otherwise strong study mired in definitional issues. Is it really about skinheads or street kids? Are the behaviors reported a product of being the former of the latter?

Participant Observation. Participant observation has not been widely practiced in the study of skinheads for fairly obvious reasons. However it offers certain advantages for the study of deviant subcultures. By observing the population of study in their own environment the researcher can often gain insight that would not be possible through interviews alone, especially when little is known about the subculture. Champion (2000) points out that a researcher may observe behaviors that people would be unlikely to report in interviews.

Randy Blazak (1995) did participant observation with skinheads in Orlando, Florida. Blazak posed as a member of the local alternative music scene who was "sympathetic to the issues that the skinheads raised about ethnic groups, Jews, women, etc" (1995; 67). His effort was aided by the characteristics he had in common with the skinheads, being "young, white and male" (1995; 67). Blazak used the participant observation phase of his study to gain basic information on the skinheads and their role in the local scene. Once he became known and to some extent trusted, he began to collect structured interviews.

Emery Smith (2000) did participant observation research with skinheads in Oregon. By his own admission Smith was "too old to become a skinhead" (2000:

90) so posing as a potential recruit or hanger-on was out of the question. Instead he identified himself as a researcher. However, he managed to make a place for himself in the skinhead scene as a watcher, listener, and a storyteller. Smith also drew on the knowledge of street-smart locals to help him to understand the complexities of the skinhead subculture.

Participant observation is a tricky business, and researchers must balance their need to get where the action is, with other considerations. For the study of skinheads, participant observation can be dangerous, as Smith discovered first hand when he was surrounded by a group of aggressive skinheads. However there are other issues to be considered. Blazak posed as a person sympathetic to the skinheads' views, while Smith learned to be a good listener "laughing in the right places, showing concern where I should, and cheering when they cheered" (2000: 98). To some extent both of these situations could be viewed as a researcher positively reinforcing the ideas and behaviors of racist skinheads.

Research Methodology

In order to study the handling of conflict among skinheads a specific type of data was required. This study required detailed information about conflicts. Although information about conflicts with outsiders could possibly have been garnered from witnesses or police reports, the information about intra-group conflicts needed to be collected from the people involved, the racist skinheads themselves.

Research Design

Interviews. From reviewing other research done on skinheads as well as research done on other subcultures, I decided that interviewing was the most effective way to gather the information needed for this study. Since I was interested in conflicts, any other technique was unlikely to provide the necessary details. The only possible alternative would have been an intensive and extended participant observation study. Such studies have the disadvantage of being very time-consuming, as the researcher "is often not in a position to control the action and must wait for the activities of interest to occur" (Hagan, 1993: 201). In addition, direct participant observation can involve both the risk of physical harm to the researcher, and the risk of the researcher becoming involved in illegal activities as part of their participation in the subculture (Hagan, 1993).

To collect information on conflicts involving skinheads I chose a semi-structured interview format that employed a number of open-ended questions with the intention of letting the respondents describe events in great detail. It was further hoped that the open-ended format would encourage the skinheads to flesh-out their narratives in ways that would provide additional insight into the subculture.

Participant Observation. Although I had decided against using participant observation as the primary methodology for the study, I though it would be useful to observe skinheads interacting in a public setting. I felt that this would allow me to observe interactions among the skinheads as well as interactions with non-

skinheads. I decided to use a participant-as-observer model in which I made no attempt to conceal my role as a researcher (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). This made sense for two reasons. First, because I was older than the majority of patrons at establishments frequented by skinheads making hard for me to blend in, and second, because there was a good chance I would run into skinheads who had already been interviewed, or who I had been introduced to. I felt that being upfront about my research agenda would at least make the skinheads feel like I was being straight with them.

The observation took place primarily in bars, and all-ages music venues and occasionally in coffee shops and fast food restaurants. A few skinheads invited me to house parties, but I felt that being in a secluded place with a group of intoxicated skinheads posed an unacceptable risk. While the observation aspect of the project yielded a considerable amount of useful information, I eventually discontinued this part of the research because I came to feel that the risks to my physical wellbeing were too great.

Other Sources of Information. In addition to interviews with racist skinheads and observation of skinheads in public settings I used a variety of other sources to gather information for this project. When the opportunity permitted I engaged in short, informal interviews with anti-racist and traditional skinheads, as well as punk rockers, club bouncers and others who interacted with the skinheads. I also spent a lot of time on skinhead internet message boards, observing the comments and interactions of the site users.

Defining Skinheads

One notable feature of the existing research on skinheads is the lack of consistent findings. On topics as diverse as level of involvement with adult hate groups and drug use there are contradictory findings. Some of these differences may be attributable to methodological problems in the design of some of the earlier studies (Blazak, 1995). However, even in the more current studies many of the findings differ. Having reviewed the research I believe that a key factor to explaining the diverse findings is the issue of defining skinheads.

An important step in any research project is clearly defining the object of study. Doing this helps to ensure that the researcher will actually be studying the phenomenon that they set out to study. However, in the study of skinheads, the issue of definition is a recurring problem.

One clear example is Mark Hamm's *American Skinheads*. In the book Hamm provides an extensive history of skinheads in both England and the United States, as well as reviewing media and law enforcement accounts of skinheads, but he never pins himself down to a clear research definition. This plays out in his favor as his analysis develops and he identifies several types of skinheads with different characteristics. However, I suspect that even a fairly broad research definition would have excluded several of his respondents.

One especially interesting aspect of Hamm's approach is that he doesn't use visual, or stylistic, criteria for identifying skinheads. This allows him to include individuals in his sample that do not look like skinheads. This contradicted the earlier English research that indicated that visual style was a

central aspect of skinhead identity (Brake, 1974; Pearson, 1976; Clarke and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). This problem is compounded when Hamm suggests that the skinheads who dress in skinhead style behave differently than those who do not. In terms of both hairstyle and dress Hamm indicates that the youths he describes as terrorists differ to varying degrees from recognizable skinhead style. They are more likely to have longer hair, and are less likely to wear clothing influenced by English skinhead style (Hamm, 1993).

Hamm's approach raises many questions. If visual style is not a defining characteristic of a skinhead, what is? Is being young and subscribing to a white supremacist ideology the defining factor? If so what about traditional (non-political) skinheads and anti-racist skinheads? What about the fact that the skinhead subculture existed before white supremacist ideology infiltrated its ranks?

In creating a research definition of skinheads for the current project, my goal was first and foremost to be clear about who I would consider to be a skinhead. Drawing on the definitions of the English researchers who did the earliest work on the skinhead subculture I decided that a visual criterion was essential. I have been doing research on skinheads since the mid-1990's and I have yet to meet anyone who claims to be a skinhead who does not, at least to some extent, look the part. Brake (1974) and Clarke and Jefferson (1976) stress the symbolic importance of heavy boots, rolled-up jeans and the short haircut, or crop. This emphasis on appearance is echoed in the more recent work of

Forman (1992), Wooden (1995), Blazak (1995), Young and Craig (1997), Baron (1997), and Wooden and Blazak (2001):

> Today skinheads in England and the United States are characterized by a uniform appearance: Doc Martens or industrial boots, such as those commonly worn by fire fighters – which can now be purchased in most large chain department stores; heavy jeans rolled up over the boots; suspenders; green flight jackets; and, most of all, short and manageable hair resembling servicemen in boot camp. (Wooden and Blazak, 2001: 132).

In addition to adopting a distinctive visual style, I required that the skinheads in my study self-identified as skinheads. I included this requirement to ensure I did not conflate related youth subcultures with skinheads. There are currently a variety of youth subcultures that have ties to white supremacist ideology, and the members of these groups would not consider themselves skinheads. Finnegan (1998) distinguishes between White-supremacist skinheads and White-supremacist gangs in Southern California. In *Lords of Chaos* (1998) Moynihan and Soderlind discuss the influence of neo-Nazi ideology on heavy metal music fans involved in the black metal scene. In addition, there are hardcore punk fans who adopt a shaved head and boots look, but consider themselves to be neither skinheads nor racists (Wood, 1999).

To add to the confusion, elements of skinhead style have been adopted by people outside the subculture. In the late 1980's Doctor Marten's boots began enjoying mainstream popularity. In the 1990's the shaved head look became fashionable for men, largely due to the adoption of the style by popular black athletes. More recently Fred Perry and Ben Sherman shirts,

long a fashion staple of skinheads, have increased in popularity as a mainstream fashion item. As the markers of skinhead identity have been diluted by mainstream adoption, identifying skinheads has become more difficult.

By requiring the people in my sample to self-identify as skinheads I avoided the possibility of including members of other groups. To be in the sample a person had to indicate that they were currently, or had in the past been a skinhead. If a person was unable or unwilling to make that identification they were excluded from the sample.

A third criterion I included in my definition was that the individual was identified as a skinhead by other skinheads. This was based of the work of Moore (1994), and Smith (2000). Smith (2000) argues that skinhead identity is a public identity, one that is accepted by both other skinheads and by the general public.

A fourth criterion, also based on the work or Moore and Smith, as well as drawing on the work of earlier researchers such as Brake (1974) is that the individual was associated with a skinhead collective. To be defined as a skinhead for this project a person had to be a member of a defined skinhead crew. Being a member of a crew signifies acceptance as a skinhead by other skinheads, and also indicates active involvement in the skinhead subculture.

The last criterion of my definition was that the skinhead be a self-identified racist skinhead. This was because I was interested in racist skinheads rather than traditional or non-racist skinheads. If a skinhead was

unwilling to identify themselves as a racist skinhead they were excluded from the sample.

Getting Access

Skinheads do not seem to mind being interviewed, but rather show signs of being more concerned about being deceived as to the true purpose of the interview. Federal Bureau of Investigation investigators observe that even they have little difficulty getting skinheads to talk to them (Schafer and Navarro, 2003). Some of the skinheads I interviewed took me at face value while others questioned my credentials. During the course of the interviewing phase I was accused of being a police officer, a federal agent, a member of a Jewish activist group (the Anti-Defamation League, and the Jewish Defense League both came up), or of working for the Southern Poverty Law Center.

When contacting potential interview subjects I found some of them to be suspicious of my motives. In one instance when leaving a telephone message for a potential interview subject with whom I had had no prior contact, I forgot to mention the name of the skinhead who had recommended him. It turned out that the skinhead who suggested I call this person had also forgotten to mention it to him. As a result I received a flustered phone call demanding to know how I had gotten his number. I eventually did interview this skinhead and he mentioned that he originally thought I must have been an undercover law enforcement officer with access to surveillance information to know his phone number. It apparently didn't occur to him that I might have just asked someone, or looked him up in the phonebook since he had a listed number.

In another case a skinhead questioned my credentials based on similar reasoning. I had sent an interview request to a post office box address listed as a contact address on a skinhead internet site. The recipient suggested in their reply that I was likely a member of a Jewish activist group, specifically the Anti-defamation League or the Jewish Defense League. He said his evidence was that, "you have a name to attach to this PO Box when I do not have one listed." The irony of this is that his name and address were clearly listed on the internet and accessible to anyone.

Sampling Methodology

Because of the nature of the population I was going to study it was not feasible to try and collect a random sample. There is no comprehensive list of racist skinheads. Even if there were, I do not think I would have fancied cold-calling them at home and asking them to participate. An alternative selection strategy was needed.

Network Sampling. In order to gain access into the world of racist skinheads I used a sampling method that is commonly used in sociology and criminology to study deviant populations called network or snowball sampling. "Snowball sampling is ubiquitous in the study of deviant populations because it often represents the only way of gathering a sample" (Lee, 1993). This method is limited by the fact that it requires that some sort of social network exists between the members of the population of study. However, since racist skinheads do have social networks, this limitation was not an issue for my research project. In both 1995 and 1998 I started with a single contact who

connected me with other interview subjects. During the most recent interview phase I started with three contacts, two of whom I knew from my prior research and one who was an acquaintance. As the interview process continued I was introduced to three skinheads who had connections with other groups. The use of these six contacts yielded 24 interviews. Despite the fact that many of the respondents seemed happy that someone was interested in them, my requests for an interview were rejected by about a third of the people I approached. This may seem like a low percentage but it is important to remember that these rejections occurred after my contacts had vouched for me, and the skinhead had suggested that they might be willing to be interviewed.

One comment I should make about network sampling is that it has a tendency to produce a biased sample as each link in the referral chain is likely to have a relationship with those who come before and after. This can create a sample in which many of the respondents share similar characteristics (Davis, 1986; Lee, 1993). Although this may be less of a problem with racist skinheads who are a relatively homogeneous population, I began the sampling using multiple contacts to mediate the bias effect. Using multiple starting points also has the advantage of providing wider coverage of the sample population (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

In one respect the bias effect of using a network sample could be seen as working in my favor. When I would monitor the activities on skinhead websites, on the message boards there would occasionally be a request for interview subjects posted. This raised an interesting question, because in this type of

forum there is no way to know who is actually a skinhead and who is not. On any given skinhead message board there was much discussion devoted to those members who were suspected of being posers or "internet-skinheads", homosexual fetishists, anti-racist activists, law-enforcement agents and the like. As mentioned earlier, using network sampling tends to produce a fairly homogeneous sample, which in my case meant that if I started with a primary contact that fit my research definition of a racist skinhead, then the people he referred to me would be people he felt also met that description. This served to reduce the possibility that my sample would include people who would not be considered a skinhead by other skinheads.

While the bias effect inherent in network sampling did work in my favor to a certain extent, there were also several potential problems that I had not considered. These problems also related to the homogeneity of the sample created by network sampling. It was more by luck than anything else that these problems did not become more of an issue than they did.

I knew that network sampling would provide a homogeneous sample. What I neglected to consider was that the sample would be likely to be homogeneous in terms of status unless steps were taken to mediate the bias effect. I was lucky in the sense that my initial contacts were older higher-status skinheads. Had I started the sampling chain with younger lower-status skinheads, it is unlikely I would have ever had a referral to someone of higher status. An additional benefit is that the younger skinheads may have been unsure of the consequences of giving an interview if the older skinheads had not

referred me to them. Although I did not keep a record of the order of the sampling chain, my recollection is that no-one ever referred me to someone of higher status. That is to say that every referral was lateral or downward in terms of status.

While the above issues were partly mediated by the fact I had by chance started with higher-status individuals, once I noticed the pattern I still had to act to address the situation. This was because the majority of the early referrals were made laterally in the status hierarchy. It did not seem to occur to the referrers that I might be interested in interviewing someone of lower status than themselves. One possible explanation is that the referrers felt that someone whose status was lower than theirs would have inadequate knowledge of the skinhead subculture and would be unable to contribute anything of value. The interesting thing is that the younger skinheads seemed aware of this attitude and a few even expressed surprise that a higher status skinhead would refer them to me. Once I realized that this was an issue I began to ask for downward referrals specifically.

Making Contacts Outside the Sampling Chain. The exception to the above is contacts that I attempted to make using contact addresses on racist skinhead websites in an effort to extend the scope of my research. These were a dismal failure. Most of the people I sent letters to did not respond, and those who did sent negative and, in some cases threatening, replies. A problem I encountered with some of these responses was ambiguity. A response would be negative and yet at the same time leave some leeway for further contact. Further

contact was usually conditional, requiring that I meet some random condition set by the potential respondent. This was the case with the following response:

> I find it very interesting that the "Department of Sociology" coincidentally wants to interview every [skinhead] once a name is known. Perhaps your university has not yet "researched" this, but I have seen letters virtually verbatim to yours from "universities" around the country. I have even seen them from overseas. . . If you want something to research, why not research and find the names of the owners of the Federal Reserve. I will give you a hint . . . it is not the government. If you can drop those names in your next letter, I will be more than happy to answer your questions.

In the preceding case and in several similar situations, I made the choice not to continue to attempt to recruit the potential interviewee. I made this decision for several reasons. First and foremost, I was determined not to get involved in ideological debates with racist skinheads. I did not want to be put in a situation where I felt morally obligated to argue against their beliefs. Nor was I willing to pretend to be sympathetic to their beliefs or a potential convert. I decided that to maintain my perspective as a researcher, I could not take part in this type of interaction.

The Interviews

Interviewing Strategies. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. I used an interview guide that contained questions related to my key areas of interest (see appendix). The majority of these questions were open-ended. Because cases of conflict are the unit of analysis in this study, detailed descriptions of events were very important. I needed specific details about the conflicts and the participants.

One potentially problematic issue was the dichotomy between what skinheads say and what they actually do. As mentioned earlier Smith noted that racist skinheads claimed to fight with members of minority groups, but when he engaged in participant observation, he noted that most of the fighting was, "between different gangs of racist skinheads and between skinheads in the same crew" (Smith, 2000: 91-2). One way to avoid this issue is to ask questions designed to elicit descriptions of specific events. Instead of asking "who do you fight with?" I asked the respondents to describe specific fights they had been in. By asking for concrete information, an interviewer increases the likelihood of getting an accurate response (Weiss, 1994). Since I was also interested in the general handling of conflict, I structured the interviews so that I asked for specific information about events first, and questions about general patterns of behavior when they seemed appropriate in the flow of the interview. For example, I might follow up the description of a fight between crewmembers with the question: "Is that what normally happens in that situation?"

Taping the Interviews. All the interviews done for this project were recorded on a mini-cassette recorder and later transcribed. There is some controversy surrounding the use of tape recorders for interviews, especially when the subject matter is sensitive in nature. Some researchers believe that the fear of the permanent record of the interview represented by the tape recorder influences interviewee responses (Weiss, 1994; Phillips, 2000). However, other researchers believe that taping interviews is essential, especially when using open ended questions. Lofland and Lofland (1995) argue that taping interviews

is essential as it is virtually impossible to take good notes while simultaneously paying sufficient attention to the interview subject. Researchers who have conducted interviews with racist skinheads have tape recorded the interviews, and have not reported problems arising as a result (Blazak, 1995; Smith, 2000).

I felt that for this type of project it was important to have a detailed record of what been said. This was especially true because I was interested in a variety of subjects, specific accounts of conflicts, general statements about how conflicts were usually handled, as well as descriptive information about the skinhead crews. It would have been impossible for me to take coherent notes pertaining to all these different topics while simultaneously conducting the interview.

Conducting the Interviews . All of the interviews were prearranged, and I instructed the interviewee to allow at least one and one-half hours for the interview process. The majority of the interviews were carried out in public places, specifically restaurants and coffee shops. Only one interview was carried out at a skinhead's place of residence. I made this concession because the skinhead in question was an older skinhead with a significant reputation, and I wanted to get his perspective, however he refused to be interviewed in public.

Protection of Human Subjects

IRB Approval. The University of New Hampshire' s Internal Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects originally approved this research in, and said approval was renewed on a yearly basis for the duration of the project. This included the analysis and the writing phases as well as the data collection phase. This research was conducted in compliance with the protocols specified

by the IRB. The purpose of the research was described in writing in the informed consent document that respondents had to sign. The purpose of the study was also explained by the interviewer at the start of each interview session. Any concerns or questions that the interviewees had at any stage in the research process were taken very seriously. University contact information for both the interviewer and the research supervisor was provided on the consent document in case a respondent had questions or complaints.

Confidentiality. Because this research touches on a number of sensitive subjects the respondents were promised that steps would be taken to limit the possibility of any given respondent being identified. To protect the anonymity of the respondents given the relatively small number of racist skinheads, I used several strategies. One strategy was not to disclose the locations in which the research was conducted. A second strategy was to subtly alter the accounts given by respondents. The trick was to keep the important aspects of the account intact while removing any highly specific references that could identify the respondent. To this end details like peoples names and nick-names, place names, names of specific skinhead crews and band names have been omitted or replaced with aliases. In addition, some information that was not relevant to the issue of conflict being examined in this project was either removed or altered. An example of this would be if an account made mention of someone's daughter, this might be changed to child, or even family member, depending on the bearing of that relationship on the account.

Even with the above mentioned changes there are likely to be people who would recognize some of the events described in this research. That is unavoidable. I never told my respondents that no one would recognize these incidents, and they did not ask me to disguise them so they could not be recognized. What they did request was that their names would not be linked to the discussion of specific people or incidents and the above steps were taken to accommodate these requests.

To ensure that the names of respondents remained confidential, the full names of respondents were never mentioned on the interview tapes nor were they attached to the transcriptions. Each respondent was assigned an alias before they were interviewed, and identified by that alias throughout the research process. The only place the full names of the respondents are recorded is on the consent forms that the respondents signed which are kept locked up in my office at the University of New Hampshire.

Research Issues

Modifications to Research Design

As the project progressed I made several modifications to the original research design. This was done because as I gained more information about racist skinheads, it became clear that certain aspects of my original plan were going to become problematic. The following changes were made for several reasons, both personal and practical.

Ending Participant Observation. In addition to the interview data, I collected some data through participant observation. This primarily involved

going to bars, clubs, stores that carried skinhead music and/or clothing, as well as other hangouts where skinheads congregated and observing their behavior. Since I was known to a number of the skinheads as a researcher I did not try to blend in, but explained my presence as the result of casual curiosity, rather than as an explicit part of my research agenda. Although for the most part the skinheads seemed relatively disinterested in my presence, on several occasions intoxicated skinheads made threatening comments. Some of these were directed at me as a non-skinhead, others were related to my research.

In one case, an older skinhead who I had already interviewed approached me in an advanced state of intoxication. "I know what you're doing" he said in a fairly hostile tone. I pointed out that I wasn't making any secret of what I was doing, and that I was just having a beer and checking out the scene. After a long and difficult exchange, and me buying him a beer, he lost interest and moved off to talk to some friends. After a few minutes I left in case he had a renewed problem with my presence. I had no doubt that if he attacked me a number of the other drunken skinheads present would join him. This sort of thing seems to go with the territory. Other researchers who have done field work with skinheads have reported similar encounters (Hamm, 1993; Smith, 2000).

On four out of the 11 times I engaged in this sort of observation I witnessed skinheads engaged in fairly serious acts of violence. I had intended to continue the participant observation aspect of the project until I had finished interviewing as I saw it as a potentially useful way to find new interview subjects. However, the violence that occurred on my last observation trip, when I suddenly

found myself in the middle of a confrontation between two rival skinhead factions, was serious enough that I decided these observations posed an unacceptable level of risk since they were not central to the project.

Excluding Females. I made the decision to exclude females from the study, as it seemed that possible gender variation in the ways conflicts are handled might prove a confounding factor. It also seemed unlikely that I would be able to gather enough cases to have samples from both genders of a useful size. Given the scope of the project, I decided to hold the gender of the first party in a conflict constant.

In addition, there is a certain amount of disagreement among skinheads on the role of females in groups. Research indicates that many male skinheads believe that females cannot be true skinheads, or that they are often marginalized in the subculture (Young and Craig, 1997; Blee, 2002). Some researchers argue that this is because the qualities that are considered important, such as toughness and aggressiveness, are defined in masculine ways (Hamm, 1993; Moore, 1994; Blazak, 1998). In the course of my interviews I came to realize that when a male skinhead referred to his crew collectively, he usually meant the male skinheads.

The Sample

The main source of data used for this project was accounts of conflicts and supplemental descriptive information collected from 30 interview subjects. This group consisted of 30 current and former members of five different racist skinhead groups located in various parts of the eastern United States and

eastern Canada. Four of the interviews used were collected in 1995 as part of a larger study on suburban gang members. Two more were collected in 1998 as part of my master's thesis project on the racist group the World Church of the Creator. The remaining 24 interviews were collected specifically for this project over a two year period from 1999-2001.

The majority of the interviews were all conducted on a one-on-one basis. One interview from the 1995 study was a group interview with three skinheads. I personally conducted 27 of the interviews. The remaining 3 interviews were carried out by two graduate students who were paid on a per interview basis. For the interviews that I did not do personally, I made the initial contact with the interview subject and provided the interviewer with the interview guide and details about the specific types of information I was seeking. The interviewers then set up and carried out the interviews.

At the time the interviews were conducted the respondents ranged from 17 to 28 years of age. For the reasons previously mentioned, all 30 were males. The five skinhead crews from which the interviewees were drawn are all located in cities with populations of over 100,000 people. The respondents report group sizes of eight to 20 members. The average reported group size was 13 members.

The interviewees included both respondents who were currently active in skinhead crews and those who claimed to no longer be part of a crew. The majority, 20 respondents, reported being active in skinhead crews at the time of the interviews. The other 10 reported that they were no longer actively involved

with a skinhead crew. These latter respondents reported time periods of one to five years since their last involvement with a skinhead crew.

Data Analysis Methodology

Transcription

The transcription of the taped interviews proved to be a major hurdle. This was especially true because I had not expected there to be any particular problems associated with this stage of the project. I had written and received a grant to help pay for transcription, and thought the transcription would be completed in a few months at worst. Then I began to receive transcribed pages, along with apologies from my transcriptionists. It was immediately clear that there were significant problems with the transcriptions.

The first problem can be attributed to my choice to do the majority of interviews in public places, primarily coffee shops and restaurants. Even though I had used a directional microphone for most of the interviews, the noise level was very high. "This sounds like it was recorded at the airport," was one transcriptionist's assessment of the tape she was working on. As a result of the high noise level on most of the tapes, the transcription was hard and took a long time. This meant that my grant money did not cover anywhere near as much transcription as I had hoped. More troublesome was the fact that the noise led to a large number of passages being identified as unintelligible.

The second problem was caused by the extensive use of slang and skinhead terminology in the interviews. The transcriptionists dealt with this as best they could, but unfortunately the results varied from confusing to downright

misleading. For example, in one transcription there were several references to "scar music" a term I was unfamiliar with, and didn't recall from the interviews. When I revisited the interview tape I realized these were references to ska music, a type of Jamaican dance music. While this might seem minor, the fact that the passage dealt with the orientation of skinheads to ska required that one understood that ska was a form of black music. Without that information the significance of the relationship was lost.

As a result of the serious problems with transcription, I decided that I would have to go through the transcription that had been done to check for accuracy, correct the terminology and try to salvage the lost passages. Thankfully, because I understood the terminology and the context, and I remembered many of the interviews I was able to do a more accurate and complete job. As a result of these experiences I decided that the only sensible course of action was to transcribe the remaining interviews myself.

Identifying Cases

When the transcription was complete I had 30 interviews to work from. It is important to remember that for the purposes of this project a case is a single incident of conflict, not a person. I identified 211 specific conflicts where the accounts contained sufficient details about the social structure of the case for analysis purposes.

Coding of Variables

The majority of coding categories used for this project were developed based on propositions from Donald Black's theory of self-help, and his theory of

partisanship. In order to utilize Black's theoretical propositions I needed to develop measurable indicators for a variety of concepts. The work of Scott Philips (2000; 2003) and Mark Cooney (1998) was especially helpful in this regard.

Dependent Variables. The primary dependent variable for the study was the manner in which a conflict was handled. This was not treated as a dichotomous violence/nonviolence outcome, but instead was coded to allow for the identification of other forms of conflict management that might be used to handle conflicts. For the purposes of the study, Phillips' (2003) research definition of violence was used: "Violence includes actual force and attempted force, but it does not include the threat of force or minor pushing or shoving that does not escalate to serious force" (2003: 686). Because verbal threats and minor pushing and shoving were commonplace among the skinheads, it was important to separate those behaviors from more serious acts of violence. Where violence was used to handle a conflict the perceived degree of injury was also recorded.

A second group of dependent variables related to the actions of third parties in a conflict. Although the third party action variables influence the handling of conflicts, in Blackian theory third party action considered to be a product of the relationships between the third parties and the disputants in a conflict.

Table 3.1: Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	Indicator	Response Values
Conflict handling	How was the conflict handled by the First Principal Party?	0 Inaction 1 Violence 2 Avoidance 3 Negotiation 4 Appeal for TP intervention 5 Other
Severity of Violence	How violent was the conflict?	0 No violence 1 Violence without injury 2 Non-lethal injury (minor) 3 Serious 4 Lethal injury 5 Unknown injury status
Third Party Action	What general action did the third parties take?	0 Inaction 1 Majority TPs act as peacemakers 2 Majority act as peacemakers, but at least 1 TP acts as a partisan 3 Majority do nothing, but at least 1 TP acts as a partisan 4 Number of peacemakers and partisans about equal 5 Majority of TPs act as partisans. But at least 1 TP acts as a peacemaker 6 Majority TPs act as partisans
Third Party Action	Action taken by each Third Party involved in a conflict.	0 Inaction 1 Peacemaker 2 Partisan, sides with PP1 3 Partisan, sides with PP2 4 Other
Third Party Settlement	How did Third Parties resolve the conflict?	0 No TP Settlement 1 Friendly peacemaking 2 Mediation 3 Repressive pacification 4 Exile 5 Other

Independent Variables. A variety of independent variables were used to assess the social structure of the conflict cases. These variables were categorized into three main groupings. The first category of variables included those variables that dealt with the relationship between the principal parties in a conflict. Drawn largely from Black's (1998) structural theory of conflict, these

variables allow for the assessment of the relationship between the principal parties in a conflict in terms of intimacy, cultural homogeneity and equality.

Table 3.2: Principal Party Relationship Variables

Variable	Indicator	Response Values
Relationship between Principal Parties	What is the relationship between the principal parties in this conflict?	0 Stranger 1 Family Member 2 Partner (Spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend) 3 Friend 4 Associate 5 Acquaintance 6 Other
Cultural Distance between Principal Parties-measure 1	Were the Principal Parties members of related subcultures?	0 No 1 Yes, both skinheads 2 Yes, members of related subcultures
Cultural Distance between Principal Parties-measure 2	Racial/ethnic distance	0 Different racial/ethnic group 1 Same racial/ethnic group
Stratification	What was the direction of social control in this conflict?	0 Lateral 1 Upward 2 Downward

The second group of independent variables included those used to assess the organizational dimensions of a conflict. The first of these variables assesses the organizational ties between the parties in a conflict. The second variable identifies conflicts as being between individuals or groups. The third variable assesses the role of collective liability in conflicts.

Table 3.3: Principal Party Organizational Variables

Variable	Indicator	Response Values
Group Membership (Organizational Distance)	What was the Second Principal Party's group status?	0 Outsider 1 Crewmember
Organizational Conflict	Was this conflict between individuals or between groups?	0 - Individuals 1 - Individuals who were members of opposing groups 2 - Individual against group 3 - Group against individual 4- Opposing groups
Collective Liability	Was the Second Principal Party perceived as an individual or as a representative of a group?	0 Individual 1 Representative of a group

The third grouping of independent variables included those that dealt with the relationships between third parties and the principal parties in a conflict. These variables were largely drawn from Black's (1998) conceptual models of third party behavior. The first of these variables assesses the relational distance between the third parties and the principal parties in a conflict. The second variable is a basic measure of the number of third parties present at a conflict. The next three variables look at the characteristics of individual third parties, identifying whether or not they are crew members, and assessing their relative status with regard to the principal parties in a conflict. The last two variables in this group provide a basic measure of the number of third parties that acted as partisans in a conflict and which party they sided with.

Table 3.4: Third Party Variables

Variable	Indicator	Response Values
Third Party Relational Ties	The general orientation of the Third Parties to the Principal Parties	0 All third parties were friends of both PPs. 1 Majority of TPs are friends with both PPs, but at least 1 TP is friends with one side or another. 2 Number of TPs who are friends with both PPs, and the number of TPs who are friends with one side or another is about equal. 3 Majority of TPs are friendly to one side or the other, but at least one TP is friends with both PPs. 4 All TPs are friends with one side or the other 5 None of the third parties were friends of either of the PPs. 6 Majority of TPs are friends with neither of the PPs, but at least 1 TP is friends with one side or another 7 Majority of TPs are friendly to neither side, but at least one TP is friends with both PPs
Number of Third Parties	How many people were present at the time of the conflict?	0 1 2 3 4 or more
Third Party Organizational Status	Was this Third Party a Member of the Crew?	0 No 1 Yes
Third Party Status of each Third Party-measure 1	What was the status of this individual relative to Principal Party 1?	0 Equal 1 Higher 2 Lower
Third Party Status of each Third Party-measure 2	What was the status of this individual relative to Principal Party 2?	0 Equal 1 Higher 2 Lower
Third Party alignment-measure 1	How many Third Parties sided with Principal Party 1	0 1 2 3 4 or more
Third Party alignment – measure 2	How many Third Parties sided with Principal Party 2	0 1 2 3 4 or more

The last grouping of independent variables included those variables that did not really fit into any of the above categories. In order to assess Hamm's (1993) theory of skinhead violence an alcohol consumption variable was employed. A variable was included to measure the frequency with which the skinheads appealed to agents of formal authority to help resolve a conflict. A final variable was included to assess the character of violent behavior by skinheads. This variable was designed to measure the amount of violence that was primarily moralistic from violence that seemed to have a different character.

Table 3.5: Additional Variables

Variable	Indicator	Response Values
Alcohol as a Contributing Factor in Conflicts	Had alcohol been consumed by either of the principal parties at the time of the conflict?	0 No 1 Yes by First PP 2 Yes by Second PP 3 Yes by both PPs
Appeals to Formal Authority	Were agents of formal authority (police, etc.) called on by the First Principal Party to help resolve the conflict?	0 No 1 Yes
Character of Violence	If the First Principal Party used violence what was the character of the violence?	0 No violence 1 Moralistic 2 Self-defense (physical) 3 Abuse/bullying 4 Other

In addition to analysis of specific cases using the variables listed above, my findings are also based on the extensive descriptive data that I collected both through my interviews with crewmembers and through participant observation. In addition to collecting the details of specific cases of conflict, I also gathered information about how conflicts were most often handled. These, along with descriptions of the various aspects of the crews, provided a framework for the analysis of the specific cases of conflict. One important role of these generalized

descriptions of conflict management was to provide an assessment of how typical the outcomes of specific cases were.

In Chapter 4 I provide a description of the racist skinhead crews on which this study was based. Factors such as membership, organization, attitudes, activities, political affiliations, and reasons for joining or leaving crews are discussed. In this chapter I examine the role of factors that have been previously identified as useful for explaining skinhead violence as they relate to the crews in the study. I also examine the basic organizational and relational structures of the skinhead crews. This is important because according to Black's theoretical perspective it is these structural characteristics that will shape the ways in which conflicts are handled by crewmembers. The existence of social relational, cultural and organizational ties between the crewmembers would be expected to promote solidarity among the members of a crew. Such solidarity would increase the likelihood of violent conflict with those outside the crew. Those same ties between the crewmembers would also be expected to limit violence among the members of a crew. In addition, the relative status of crew members should act as a predictor of the likelihood of a conflict turning violent. Violence should be most likely in conflicts between those of relatively equal status.

In Chapter 5 conflicts between crewmembers and people outside the crew are examined. This included conflicts with members of minority groups, conflicts with other skinheads, conflicts with members of related subcultures and conflicts with a variety of other types of outsiders. Similarities and differences between

these different types of conflicts, as well as general patterns of conflict handling are considered.

In Chapter 6 I focus on conflicts between members of the same crew. I examine how the organizational and relational ties between crewmembers shape conflict outcomes. General patterns of conflict management within the crews are also discussed.

In Chapter 7 I look at overall patterns of conflict management. Similarities and differences between out-group and in-group conflicts are discussed. The utility of the Black's structural theory of conflict for explaining both violent and non-violent conflict management by skinheads is assessed.

CHAPTER 4

THE CREWS

The project sample consisted of 30 current and former members of five different racist skinhead groups located in various parts of the eastern United States and eastern Canada. At the time the interviews were conducted the respondents ranged from 17 to 28 years of age. For the reasons previously mentioned, all 30 were males. The 5 skinhead crews from which the sample was drawn are all located in cities with populations of over 100,000 people. The respondents report core group sizes of 8 to 20 members. These numbers are estimates of the number of actual group members. Each group's social scene also included girlfriends and wives, non-skinhead friends and other skinheads who socialized with the group but were not considered to be members of the crew.

The sample included both respondents who were currently active in skinhead crews and those who claimed they were no longer part of a crew. The majority, 20 respondents, reported being active in skinhead crews at the time that they were interviewed. The other 10 reported that they were no longer actively involved with a skinhead crew. These latter respondents reported time periods of one to five years since their last involvement with a skinhead crew. However, there was evidence to suggest that three of these respondents still had ties to members their former crew. In one case, a respondent who was still an active

member of a skinhead crew told a story about another respondent. This latter person had assured me that they no longer had much interaction with racist skinheads. Apparently this was an exaggeration, as this same person was reported to be a fairly frequent visitor at an apartment inhabited by several racist skinheads. According to my source, on his most recent visit he had been showing off his new handgun.

It should also be noted that no longer being an active part of a crew did not mean that these respondents had necessarily abandoned the skinhead subculture. Several still dressed like skinheads and listened to skinhead music. Some had simply "aged-out" of the active skinhead scene. They had jobs and families, and/or were unwilling to face adult legal penalties. Others had left crews after conflicts with other group members.

Group Membership

Race

Membership in any of the crews was restricted by race and ethnicity. Generally a person had to look white, although there were a few exceptions to this. It was not acceptable to be Jewish or Hispanic. Nor was it considered acceptable to have any black ancestors. Notable exceptions to this ban on minorities were two respondents who were both part Native American.

Gender

The role of females in the crews was somewhat ambiguous. There seemed to be a general consensus among the respondents that skinheads were male by definition. Females were not referred to as skinheads but as "Chelseas,"

"skingirls," "skinbyrds," or by less positive terms such as "skin-bitch". Women who had a husband or steady boyfriend who was a group member were treated better than the young females who hung around the group. In fact, there seemed to be quite a bit of tension between the wives and girlfriends and the young women who they described as "skin-groupies" or "oi-toys". There were some definite similarities the roles of females associated with the crews and the roles of women involved with outlaw motorcycle gangs where similar tensions exist between permanent partners, referred to as "old ladies" and female hangers-on referred to as "mamas" (Hopper and Moore, 1997).

Another indication that the male skinheads did not think females could be real skinheads was the fact that ascribing feminine traits to another skinhead was considered a major insult, as it is with many macho subcultures. In one instance of this from my research, an older skinhead insulted a group of younger skinheads by telling them that his female companion was "more of a skinhead than you will ever be." In another case a skinhead explained the frequent use of violence to revolve problems in the following manner, "Violence is . . . it's a manly thing. Only women sit down and talk."

The women also seemed to cease to actively participate in the skinhead subculture earlier than the men. On a number of occasions I observed older male skinheads drinking in bars late at night, but rarely saw their wives or serious girlfriends in attendance. This may have been because the women were home caring for children, or because it was deemed inappropriate to bring a spouse when going drinking with the boys. These findings are similar to those of Young

and Craig (1997) who found that gender relations in the skinhead subculture are very similar to those manifested among North American working class populations in general.

Family Background

Social Class – A popular misconception seems to be that American skinhead groups are entirely made up of young males from blue-collar backgrounds. This may be partly due to the emphasis skinheads put on being working-class. However, among skinheads "working-class" seems to refer to a set of values rather than a specific level in the economic strata (Young and Craig, 1997; Lopes, 2001). There is a relatively consistent finding among researchers that skinheads in North America come from diverse economic backgrounds (Langer, 1990; Lopez and Mirande, 1990; Kleg, 1993; Hamm, 1993; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997; SPLC, 1998[2]).

Looking at the skinheads in North America, it becomes difficult to argue that skinheads constitute a class based phenomenon. The relatively fluidity of American social classes compared to those in England makes identifying movements or groups as class based considerably more difficult. Further, the skinheads have a tendency, based on the heavy British influence on the subculture, to identify themselves as working class, regardless of the realities of their economic background. One former crew member described the connection between the subculture's British roots and the working class ethic. "You always had to maintain that working class ideal because that's were it (the skinhead

subculture) evolved from." The crew members interviewed for this study stated that "working class" values were an essential part of the skinhead lifestyle:

> Skins are working class, they don't do drugs and they work. If you're on welfare, you're just taking from the government . . . you're weak. Working shows that you're a man, and that you're capable of doing things.

When asked if being from an actual blue-collar background was a prerequisite for group membership, most of the respondents said that it was not. One skinhead did suggest that only those who worked blue-collar jobs, and specifically manual labor jobs, could be considered real skinheads, but this seemed to be a minority opinion. All the crews had members who came from white-collar backgrounds, and/or who worked in white-collar occupations. One skinhead had the following to say about another crew member who came from a wealthy family:

> He's a good guy, you know, he doesn't say much about it, but doesn't pretend to be from the street . . . sometimes he'll just show up with a bunch of cases of beer, or one time he paid for a couple of the guys to get tattoos, but he's one of us, its not like we keep him around because he's got some cash."

My impression of the skinheads in my sample was that only a little less than half the respondents actually came from family backgrounds that were working class in a traditional sense. The majority came from middle-class families. I based this assessment on questions about where their family lived and what the parents did for work.

Trouble in the Home. A large number of respondents indicated that one source their anger and aggression was family problems. Issues mentioned

ranged from physical abuse (no sexual abuse was mentioned) to divorce to the death of a parent or family member. Of the 28 respondents whose family situation was known to me, 15, or 54% came from homes where the parents had either gotten divorced, or one parent had left or died. In three cases family members other than they parents had actually raised the respondent. In all three of these cases the responsibility for raising the respondent had fallen on a single grandparent.

Parental Racism. Are skinheads the product of exposure to overt racist values in the family setting? None of the respondents indicated that their parents were active members of any racist group, nor did most say that their parents were overtly racist. Some further stressed that their parents held anti-racist beliefs:

> Of all the ones I've known, none of them were brought up racist, none have parents that were racist.
>
> My mother is a liberal, she can't understand my views.
>
> We're not naïve like our parents.
>
> Our parents don't understand our politics, some don't like it, some don't care.

The last quote above raises an interesting point as the speaker suggests that some presumably non-racist parents do not care about their children dabbling in racism and Nazism. Other interviewees also mentioned parents who either didn't care about, or chose to ignore, these behaviors:

> I think they thought it was just a phase and it would pass. Kinda just tried to ignore it.

> I used to wear my swastika tee shirt and stuff and my parents just laughed it off.

Another interesting parental approach was the single mother described in the following quote who tried to be supportive of her son's activities:

> Yeah we liked going over there because it was a big house and we could drink and listen to loud music. [The son] had this huge Nazi flag on the wall of his room, and she would say, like "boys, couldn't you put up something nicer." When he was 16 she took us down to get tattoos and wrote us little permission notes.

Dress and Symbolism

Dress

The dress of the skinheads in my sample did not vary greatly from their British counterparts. For the most part the desirable styles and brands have been defined by British skinheads of the 1960's and 1980's. Heavy steel-toe boots in black or red with rolled up jeans or military-style pants and nylon air force style "bomber" jackets in black or sage green are the most common elements of the uniform. A skinhead's boots often referred to as "Docs" or "steelies" are central to the skinhead image, serving to reinforce both the tough guy and the working class aspects. While military boots are sometimes worn, the more desirable boots come from British makers and are branded Dr. Martens, Gripfast, and Grinders. In America a pair of these boots can be expensive and some skinheads go to extreme lengths to keep them in good shape. A former skinhead explained to me that in the early 1990's when such boots were very expensive and relatively hard to find, the skinheads in his town wore their boots in the spring, summer, and fall, and wore canvas Converse All-Star sneakers

through the winter so as to preserve the condition of the boots. Some prior research has discussed the messages conveyed by the wearing of white or red bootlaces. The skinheads in my sample suggested that generally white laces identified the wearer as a racist skinhead, but that the wearing of colored laces largely reflected what the wearer thought looked cool:

> White laces in oxblood Docs just look gay. I guess they look okay with black boots, but I always just use black laces.

Shirts typically worn by the skinheads include t-shirts bearing a variety of white power, Nazi, and related themes. Band t-shirts where also popular, especially the logo of the Racist British Oi band Skrewdriver. The logos of several non-political rock bands such as Motorhead and the Misfits were also commonly worn. The skinheads also wore polo shirts from British makers like Fred Perry, Ben Sherman, or Lonsdale. While these brand names usually draw blank stares from all but the trendiest Americans, they are widely known in England.

Some skinheads wore thin clip-on suspenders, which they referred to as braces. The most popular colors were black, red and white. The braces seemed to have little functional purpose and were often worn hanging down. I had read that when a skinhead had his braces hanging down he was ready for a fight, but since several of my interview subjects arrived at coffee shops in the middle of the day with their braces hanging down, I suspect this might simply be a matter of preference. Most of the older skinheads I encountered seemed to prefer belts over braces.

American skinheads may embellish the basic style in a variety of ways but the skinhead uniform remains heavily influenced by the dress of the British skinheads. In England the skinhead style was a statement of working class pride. In North America this class message is lost. The stylistic elements are simply too alien, too English. A skinhead told me that his uniform had been criticized by British skinheads, not because of a sartorial rules violation, but simply because he wasn't British:

> There was a white power band from England over and they were staying with my roommate at the time and they couldn't believe we were wearing bombers and boots and jeans and they said they wore it because it was cheap, and we asked "well, how do you expect then we should dress as skinheads?" And he said "In the checkered hunting coat and work boots. Because that's your white man." Their image of a white guy in North America is wearing a ball cap and a hunting coat and work boots, and that would be their uniform if they came over here.

The dress of the racist skinheads did not seem to be in itself distinctive from the dress of other skinheads I had encountered. It seems like the general style of all the various factions was very similar. This meant that especially for a person outside the subculture, the symbols a skinhead displayed were the only real indicator of their affiliations.

Symbolism

Beyond their basic style of dress, the skinheads in the sample used a wide variety of symbols to establish both their skinhead and political identities. Such symbols were displayed as patches sewn on jackets, on t-shirts, on pins, and on belt buckles. Beyond these wearable symbols I noticed many of the skinheads had items such as wallets, bottle openers, cell phone cases and the like that were emblazoned with white supremacist or Nazi symbols. It turns out that there

are numerous catalogues from which such items can be obtained. Most of the symbols used can be sorted into three categories, skinhead, white supremacist, and neo-Nazi.

Skinhead symbols. These were symbols that were related to skinhead identity. Such symbols might be seen displayed by any skinhead regardless of political orientation.

The bulldog – This is a widely used skinhead symbol. I was told that it represents toughness, but I suspect that it was originally used by the British skinheads to express their nationalism as the bulldog is often used as a representation of England. This symbol was seen on patches and t-shirts. Several skinheads were observed to be wearing Mack Truck t-shirts which displayed that company's bulldog logo.

The crucified skinhead – This is another widely used skinhead symbol depicting a black and white outline drawing of a skinhead nailed to a cross. I observed this on t-shirts and several skinheads had this image tattooed on their bodies. I have never really been able to get a satisfactory explanation for the meaning of this symbol. The explanations I have been offered are varied and tend to revolve around the persecution of skinheads by society and the media. One skinhead who had a crucified skinhead tattoo told me it was something that other skinheads would recognize even if he wasn't dressed in his gear, an ever-present marker of his skinhead identity.

White supremacist symbols. A wide variety of white supremacist symbols were observed in the course of the interviews. Some were tied to membership,

or at least affinity for, specific white supremacist or racialist organizations. Other symbols were more general and didn't associate the wearer with a particular organization.

A. General white-supremacist symbols – These are symbols that do not necessarily connote membership in or affinity towards any specific white supremacist organization

WP – Initials standing for white power or white pride.

14 – A reference to the 14 Words, a statement by influential imprisoned white supremacist David Lane.

Confederate flag – This was a very commonly used symbol.

White power fist – This was an upraised white fist. I was told that this signified a willingness to fight for the future of the white race.

Celtic cross – This was another widely used symbol comprised of a cross with a circle around it. A black Celtic cross on a red background was the emblem of the Aryan Nations organization. However the symbol had become so widely used that it no longer represented any particular ties to the Aryan Nation, but rather a more general white supremacist orientation.

B. Organizational symbols – These were symbols associated with various white supremacist or racialist organizations.

Blood drop patch – This is the symbol of the Ku Klux Klan.

W with Crown – This is the symbol of the World Church of The Creator

RAHOWA – This stands for racial holy war, and is generally associated with the World Church of the Creator.

Tree of Life – This is the Symbol of the National Alliance.

Neo-Nazi Symbols – In addition to white supremacist symbols many of the skinheads also displayed the following neo-Nazi symbols.

88 – This is a numerical code referencing the eighth letter of the alphabet twice. The resulting letters HH are shorthand for Heil Hitler. A less common variant of this was the number 18, for AH or Adolph Hitler.

Swastika – Probably the most widely recognized Nazi symbol. This was observed on a wide variety of items from t-shirts to cigarette lighters.

Lightning runes – This double lightning bolt motif was the symbol of Hitler's Schutzstaffel, the infamous SS.

The Totenkopf or Death's Head – This skull and crossbones design was also originally worn by members of the SS.

The display of white supremacist and neo-Nazi symbols clearly identified the wearer as a racist skinhead. At the same time it led me to question to what degree the wearing of such symbols indicated a deep commitment to the ideologies these symbols represent. I was struck by the fact that some of the skinheads, usually the younger ones, wore symbols that reflected incompatible ideologies. This was especially apparent given that some white supremacist organizations have very different orientations towards religion. It was not unusual for a younger skinhead to be wearing pro-Christian, anti-Christian, and Nazi symbols at the same time. This led me to believe that the symbols were worn more for the general message that they conveyed. In this sense these

symbols were being used as power symbols. The main function of such power symbols is to empower the wearer and intimidate others (Katz, 1988):

> When you're wearing your bomber and you're wearing patches, you want people to look at you. Sort of a shock value thing.

Music

With band names like Cut Throat, Attack, and Riot and CD titles like English Rose's *Kill Baby Kill* racist skinhead bands can hardly be accused of subtlety. The music is loud and fast, the lyrics often glorify violence. While there is little question that adult hate groups have tried to use skinhead music as a recruiting tool, the respondents saw the music as being part of the skinhead scene, that is, as music produced by racist skinheads for racist skinheads.

When asked what they liked about the racist skinhead bands several respondents indicated that the aggression in the music resonated with how they themselves were feeling:

> Most of the better choruses you can sing along to when you're drinking, it sort of involves impromptu mass choirs, clinking bottles and raising fists. The emotion of the music is by and large aggression, something the kids feel.

> I liked the music, the Skrewdriver stuff. I'd start listening to the tempo of the song, and I'd be like, "this is a really good band." One day I started listening to the lyrics and going, "yeah, yeah, I'm an angry bastard, I know what they're saying, fuck them all!"

Other respondents indicated that the music helped them to define what it meant to be a racist skinhead. The music tends to revolve around themes of white supremacy, violence and brotherhood, and these were all considered to be central aspects of the racist skinhead subculture. Several respondents indicated

that racist skinhead bands had been more influential than other sources in shaping their views on race.

> . . .if you listen to any of the music that's all what its based on. The white man sticking up for his race being on top.

Group Organization

Several studies of skinheads have described skinhead crews as being loosely organized (Smith, 2000; Baron, 1997; Young and Craig, 1997; Moore, 1994). My own experience was that the skinheads' distinctive style of dress and the tendency to gather in groups gave the illusion of a much greater degree of organization than actually existed. None of the skinhead crews I encountered had appointed or elected positions or committees. None of the crews had a formal code of conduct, and while most of the respondents could come up with some general rules for behavior these seemed to relate more to being a racist skinhead, or a skinhead, in general than to a particular crew.

Hierarchical Structure

None of the crews had a single, clearly defined, leader. Status positions in the crews were largely based on respect rather than on assigned rank. In his ethnography of urban gangs *Islands in the Street* Martin Jankowski provides a useful definition of respect in the gang context:

> "Respect" is something that is active – that is, it is the act of achieving deference. A gang member has to earn respect; it is not something that everyone has. In addition, once a person has earned respect, he must be willing to protect it, because a person's reputation depends on respect, and reputation is an essential resource for success (Jankowski, 1991: 142).

Respect is important to individual skinheads because those who have not managed to earn respect tend to be subjects of ridicule and distain. When I asked a skinhead about the consequences of backing down from a fight he answered "You'd lose respect, and that's worse than getting beat up in a group like this because then you're nothing." Respect is also important for the continuance of the crews as it seems to be the thing that provides what little organizational structure there is. Respect could be garnered in a number of ways.

Tenure and Status. One of the most important of these seems to be the length of time a skinhead had spent in the skinhead scene. As one skinhead put it, "You've got to put in your time, pay your dues." The veterans or "old guys" seemed to be accorded a large amount of respect by younger group members. It was explained to me that the skinhead scene really existed on 2 levels. There were the younger guys and the older guys. You could be considered a tough guy and relatively high status among the younger skinheads, but still have lower status than any of the veteran skinheads in the older group. This division was reinforced by the ability of older skinheads to get into bars, which led to the younger groups and older groups generally hanging out in different locales and only really coming together at rock concerts and house parties. One skinhead described the interaction between the older and the younger skinheads in the following manner:

> You'd end up at one of the older guy's houses and there would be other older guys there and it was definitely like a hierarchy there. But, it was almost like they were paying their respects. And like you'd bring the new

guy, to introduce you and so these guys can check you out, see if you're cool or what.

Respect was identified as an important factor in the relationship between the older skinheads and the younger skinheads. The older skinheads tended to prize their status and often took steps to further distinguish themselves from the younger skinheads. An assortment of visual cues was used to identify a skinhead who had spent time in the scene. These ranged from various difficult to obtain clothing items to tattoos:

> The older skins don't want anything to do with people who just go out and acquire a uniform overnight. That probably explains why tattoos have gotten bigger. Twenty year olds are bound to have tattoos and 13 year olds aren't.
>
> You see some of the older guys wearing the three button Fred Perry polos, that's the old style, the original style. The new ones have two buttons. That shows they've been in the scene for a while.

At the same time, the younger skinheads were basically trying to emulate both the appearance and behavior of the older skinheads.

> A lot of times the young guys will try to play catch-up, try to be like the older guys, one of the boys. Of course you never can be.
>
> The young guys were always trying to prove themselves.

The younger skinheads had to walk a fine line between establishing a reputation for toughness and showing appropriate respect for the older skinheads. Younger individuals who did not show sufficient respect for the older skinheads were likely to be corrected by either their peers or by an older skinhead. Those who displayed a consistent pattern of disrespectful behavior were not likely to remain members of the crew for long:

> Every so often someone new to the scene would challenge one of the big guys, they just didn't get it that you can't get respect that way, everybody just thinks you're an asshole. Those are the ones that don't stick around.

Status based on length of tenure in the crew was important to the older skinheads because it was the one factor that couldn't be trumped by any other factor. Even the toughest newcomer to the crew owed the veteran members respect. In this sense the status hierarchy in the crews is self-sustaining, in that those who refuse to accept the established order of things either leave or are weeded out. Those that remain are generally willing to accept the status that their age and tenure in the crew dictates.

Fighting and Status. Toughness, measured in terms of both fighting ability and willingness to stand up for oneself, was also an important source of status. Even the veteran skinheads have to maintain a tough front or risk losing some of their status in the group. One skinhead discussed the importance of fighting to status in terms of incremental gains and losses that he referred to as "pain points." Fighting, or other acts of violence, generally served to elevate a person's status in the crew. However, backing down from a fight could just as quickly lower one's status. As one skinhead put it, "You constantly have to prove yourself."

> If you're in a fight and you took off running because there's 15 guys ready to beat you up, and you went back and got your buddies, you'd be alright because they'll know you can't win. But if you stayed and fought them you'd get even more respect.

> One thing I do believe in and one thing I was told when I started hanging out with these guys is the more beatings you take the tougher you get, there's no loss of pride.

The link between fighting and status in the crews raises the question; do people get into fights as part of a deliberate strategy for building a reputation? This would constitute a form of instrumental violence. The skinheads in my sample did not seem to think that this was the case in most conflicts:

> You don't really think about it [how the fight is going to effect your reputation] at the time.
>
> I don't think people look at it like that, maybe the little fucks do, but if that was a big deal I don't think that you'd see many fights because everybody would be scared to lose.
>
> If you worry about the consequences of fighting, like "am I going get my fucking head kicked in?" or "am I going to look fucking bad if I get my ass kicked?" then you're not going to want to fight. It gets noticed pretty quick if you, you know, talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

A number of the skinheads pointed out that if fights were based around building status there would be a serious disincentive to get involved in a fight you might lose. As a result people would pick their fights very carefully. In reality it is the skinheads who seem to give little thought to the likely outcome of a fight that tend to be more respected in the crew.

Action and Status. Beyond simply being tough, a skinhead can build a reputation by consistently behaving in a manner that creates good stories. Moore (1994) suggests that engaging in action creates stories, and having exciting stories to tell is an important part of being a skinhead. Someone who creates good stories through their actions can be a good person to hang around with as simply being present at a storied event can enhance a skinhead's reputation (Smith, 2000; Moore, 1994).

I asked one of the skinheads in the sample how a skinhead could gain a reputation in the skinhead scene. His answer was "The best thing to do is be a crazy motherfucker." Among the skinheads being a crazy motherfucker could be a positive or a negative thing. The respondent was using the positive meaning which referred to a skinhead who behaved in a manner that considered both extreme and admirable. Admirable because it displayed a commitment to core skinhead values, and extreme because it went beyond what most of the skinheads would be willing to do. The following stories illustrate the type of behaviors other skinheads tell stories about, and in the process contribute to both the status of the subject and to the teller's own status by identifying them as someone who's in the know:

> The boys were standing at the bus shelter one day, they got bus schedules on poles in this big steel box with glass, and he's there whacking it with his head, trying to break it off the pole. It took him about 60 times. Split himself wide open. When he finally got it, he's like "Man I feel better." He's fucking nuts. He'd never back down, regardless of how many people was there, he'd take the beating.

> [A crew] raided a club were they knew a bunch of SHARP faggots were. Just fucking busted in past the bouncers like a fucking blitzkrieg, just grabbed people and started fucking wailing on them. Laid the SHARPS right out, then got out before anyone could even fucking react.

Prison-time and Status - Having spent time in prison or jail, especially for the commission of a violent crime was also something that was said to elevate a person's status in the group:

> You know there's a certain amount of respect for that [prison time]. A lot of these guys see anybody going to jail for any kind of hate crime or anything as an honorable thing.
>
> It was considered a badge of honor.

Skinheads in prison were sometimes referred to as prisoners of war and some white supremacist groups encouraged their members to write supportive letters to inmates. Skinheads who have served longer sentences tended to become involved with white supremacist person gangs like the Aryan Brotherhood, also known as "the Rock" a reference to the shamrock tattoo that symbolizes membership. Membership in prison gangs tended to impress other skinheads as it was seen as a testament to both a person's toughness and their dedication to the white supremacist cause. The latter is highly questionable, as research on Aryan prison gangs suggests that they are, at heart, criminal syndicates focused on power and money rather than political causes. According to prison gang expert Tony Delgado, "There's no doubt the Aryan Brotherhood are a bunch of racists, but when it comes to doing business, the color that matters most to them isn't black or white – it's green" (quoted in Holthouse, 2005:23).

Several former skinheads said that despite their tough demeanor and willingness to engage in violence most skinheads greatly feared the possibility of going to prison:

> I was a tough guy, a big tough guy. That night I got arrested with a lot of charges, but when I woke up the next morning and heard the prosecutor going 6 ½ years I almost shit my pants. The only thing I could think of was "hate crime." All my assault charges, I didn't even care about them, but I had one charge that was a hate crime. I'm like, "if that follows me into jail I can get in a lot of trouble for that."
>
> It usually boils down to the point no one wants to go to jail. They want to be the tough guy, you know, they want to be the big man skinhead, but when it comes to going to fucking jail, no one wants to go there.

Other Sources of Status – A few respondents mentioned other sources of status in the crews:

> There are two or three ways to make it in terms of being a known skinhead especially within white power circles. One is to be a real badass and you would fight anyone, or be in a band, or be a promoter or organizer high up in the white power community. Usually you don't do a combination of those.

These additional sources of status tended to be a function of tenure in the scene. Newcomers to the scene were unlikely to have access to prominent roles in the white supremacy movement or the skinhead music scene.

Sources of Cohesion

The skinhead crews were held together by several factors. One was the desire to be part of the crew. A lone skinhead has little credibility, but a crew provides both credibility and allies. The importance of the crew was manifested in the tendency of the skinheads to use "we" rather than "I" statements during the interviews which suggests the adoption of a collective identity. If a skinhead wished to remain in the crew they had to show respect for the older skinheads, essentially legitimizing the established social order of the crew.

Membership in a crew provided both a social circle and a group of allies. Crewmembers were expected to provide support for their fellows if there was trouble. As one crewmember told me, "Skins watch each other's backs."

Another important factor that held the crew together was that involvement in the crew limited the social circle of the crew members. Because involvement in overtly racist groups is largely stigmatized in modern society, the skinheads were shunned by many people, and found themselves violently at odds with

others. The act of choosing to join the crew and identify one's self as a skinhead and a racist creates a social reaction that is likely to limit other options:

> I think what keeps them together is knowing you're hated, so you have no choice but to stick together.

Racism

The role of racism and racist ideology in racist skinhead crews would seem to be fairly obvious since the skinheads define themselves by virtue of this ideology. For this reason many people view the fundamental issue to be one of racism. It seems obvious that anyone who would self-identify as a member of a racist skinhead crew must have strong racist beliefs. This would seem to be especially true given the degree to which assuming such a label generates social stigma under current social conditions. However, the skinheads in my sample provided a wide range of positions and opinions on the issues of racism, racist ideology and the connections between the skinhead subculture and adult hate groups.

Racist Attitudes among Current Crew Members

> You have to side with your own kind, there is no other choice. It's the only way you can survive. Do you think they care about you?

While all of the active crew members identified themselves has holding racist views, the strength and specific nature of these views varied from person to person. Most of these skinheads seemed to be more focused on visible minorities, especially Blacks. Other groups mentioned were Hispanics and Asians. Several crew members also brought up Jews, largely in the context of Jewish control of the government or media.

Many of the crew members expressed the view that society had become biased against whites:

> Black power, be proud to be black, that's okay, that's great, but don't even mention white pride, that's bad. How can it be bad to take pride in your race? I mean what the fuck! How can it be bad for us to do it but not for them?
>
> I don't believe in affirmative action because I believe it is wrong.
>
> We've got all these Jews in power who take away our rights and hand them to the muds.
>
> The media tells white women that they should have sex with niggers, that race-mixing is okay. They (Jews?) want to make us (whites) extinct.
>
> I'm tired of "You took us out of Africa, you made us slaves, you owe us payback." Let's get rid of these assholes. Let's shut them up. Let's put them on the boat and send them home.
>
> All through the fucking thing, we are taking a lot of the rap, our generation, for something we didn't do. I had nothing to do with bringing a fucking boat load of slaves over here.

Other skinheads made similar statements but also suggested that the social gains made by women over the last several decades were an additional threat to the position of white males:

> Look, whites are having a hard time. We've got to close the borders. If you're 22 and 23 you're not going to get a job because they're going to hire a woman, or a black guy or a Chinese guy before you.

In the above statements the skinheads seem to be framing themselves as the losers in a rapidly changing society. Recent gains by minorities and women are seen as threats to the "natural" order of things. To the skinheads the idea that society is progressing towards a better state through a process of social evolution is completely alien. Thus the idea that social gains by minorities will

benefit everyone is rejected. "[A]nything that could undermine [White male] dominance represents a threat. Antiracism, gay rights, feminism, and multiculturalism are all perceived as enemies of the status quo" (Blazak, 2001). Using this logic, any gain by a minority group is seen as a loss for whites.

By constructing an ideological world where whites are under siege, the skinheads provide themselves with the justification to engage in what most outside observers would consider unprovoked aggression against members of minority groups. The skinheads identify themselves as protectors of the white race and argue that their violence, and to a certain extent, their racism is provoked by threats to the white race:

> If I go out and say I'm white and I'm proud to be white, I'm a racist for saying that. But yet Joe Blow down the street can say 'Yeah I'm proud to be black,' and people are totally sympathetic to that because we are scared. We're scared as a society to say anything against them because of what happened in the past. I mean, if you're going to shit on me for being white, I'll turn around and shit on you for your race.
>
> Yeah, but like I say, I'm fed up, as a white person being blamed for stuff. Until people of other races stop blaming us for it, you're always going to have racism. We're human beings, we're animals, we're confrontational, like, if you're in my face, it's an instant reaction for us to get back in your face.

Crewmembers also told stories of personal victimization by members of minority groups. One skinhead had been severely injured in a bullying incident by a group of black youths when he was in junior high school. Another spoke of how his fear of victimization by black youths caused him to join the skinheads:

> Part of it was, that at my school . . . I didn't want to be, you know, weak, seen as weak. The niggers would push people around so I did, you know, started dressing like a skin, acting like a crazy shit, and then they didn't

> want to fuck with me . . . it was easier to fuck with someone else, an easier target.

Other skinheads also shared stories of victimization at the hands of minorities:

> I remember when I was 16, I'm god of the street. Walked right through a group of black guys, with two girls. We ordered our pizza, the guy goes, "You a skinhead?" "Yup." All off a sudden I'm on the floor being dragged outside. His buddy's in the process of telling me how he's gonna put a couple of bullets in my head.
>
> When I was a punk I was at this street fair and these (black) kids jumped me. One kicked me in the balls, I peed blood for a couple of days after.

Other skinheads said they had been attacked because of their political beliefs:

> Hundreds of people wanted to beat me up because I was into white power and anybody who was an organizer for a white power group was a target.
>
> . . . so we have ARA which stands for Anti Racist Action . . .We had a bunch of them come down to our apartment and throw bricks through our windows, smashed it up a bit.

The general theme of skinheads being the victims of negative treatment by others was fairly consistent. It certainly meshed with research findings that indicate that skinheads tend to construct the violence they are involved in as being instigated by the other party. It also illustrates the importance of understanding the actions of skinheads from their own perspective.

Although the crew members self-identified as racists, many also commented on other crews or other cities where they thought the skinheads were too involved with white supremacist ideology. This type of thinking is reflected in the following statement made by a crew member about the racist skinheads in another city. "Those guys are a lot more paranoid than some other groups. I mean, they take it pretty seriously, the whole white power thing." A

similar comment was directed towards the actions of skinheads in another region. "That's a whole different thing, those fuckers are crazy."

Racist Attitudes among Former Crew Members

There was a greater amount of variation in the attitudes of the former crew members. The responses of this latter group painted a much more complex picture of the relationship between racism and membership in a racist skinhead crew. While some of the ex-crew members retained racist beliefs, others said that they now believed that the racist beliefs they had previously held were wrong. One ex-crew member described his change of views in the following manner:

> At the time I never really thought about it much, because it's all around you when you're with the group. It's like, the music, the lyrics, we listened to *Skrewdriver* and *Brutal Assault*, and all that shit and it's all about being white warriors. And everybody would be saying nigger, and spic, gook or whatever so it just seemed normal I guess. It wasn't until I left and started hanging around with other people that I realized how fucked up it really was. . . These days I try to judge people on their actions, not whether they're white or not.

Four of the ex-skinheads said that they had never been particularly racist and had been involved with a crew for reasons totally unrelated to racism. Here we come to the bizarre arena of conflict between racists and anti-racists in the American skinhead subculture. While it seems fairly a clear cut ideological conflict, other factors may play a role in determining loyalties, these often being related to the intricacies of being a skinhead in America. Welcome to the world of racist non-racists, and not-particularly-racist racists. One ex-skinhead described his struggle to try and conform to the norms of the crew when he didn't really share their racist beliefs:

> I tried being a flag waving Nazi, but I couldn't say nigger and couldn't say kike and I couldn't use that in a sentence, right? So it's not in there. So I guess, to a certain degree, you have to believe it, you know, in order to be it. . . For me it was always like I wanted to be part of their group, but I didn't want to be a racist, but I wanted them to accept me.

All of the above mentioned 4 respondents started out as either non-political or anti-racist skinheads and over time became involved with a racist crew:

> I think I was just mixed up and looking for a reason to cause trouble because it was more my drinking than my belief system. It was an easy way for me to release my anger, was for me to hate somebody. And you know I guess they trapped me at some point, it wasn't to the point that where I was brainwashed and I had to get deprogrammed. You know I had to take a little time, I still say some things now that bug me, that bother me for saying it.

> I wasn't a hardcore white supremacist, I was basically an alcoholic who liked to fight and drink.

> When I was hanging out with the racist skinheads drinking and they got in a fight I wasn't fighting because I was a racist. I was fighting because I liked to fight and they liked having me around when I was fighting.

In one case the skinhead's friends joined a racist crew and he followed them. In 2 other cases a skinhead moved to a new community and started hanging around with racists because they comprised the skinhead scene in that city. In the last case the skinhead joined up with a racist crew after splitting from an anti-racist crew as the result of a conflict with other members.

These cases seem to suggest that the choice to be a racist skinhead is not necessarily driven by racism, and can be instead a function of being a skinhead first and adopting the racist stance later. Additionally I heard accounts of former racist crew members who now belonged to SHARP (Skinheads against Racial Prejudice) crews because they liked the people in the SHARP crew better

than their former crewmates. There were a number of accounts of people moving to other cities and switching sides because of the local dynamic. Skinheads also switched sides because they had a falling out with their crew. Many people seemed more committed to being skinheads in general than to a particular side of the racism issue:

> I have a lot of friends who've gone to other cities and been hanging out with them [Non-racist skinheads and SHARPs]. I think that for them it's just a matter of ease, you know, they're into the subculture, they're into the communal nature of things, the brotherhood, whatever, if that's what they want to get out of it. Anything else doesn't really matter.

Racist behavior tied to social contexts

A notable aspect of skinhead behavior was that their general willingness to let their ideology be the focal point of their interactions with others was shaped by a variety of social factors. Although there were accounts of skinheads who were always "putting it out there" most were more willing to express their racist views in the company of a number of peers, especially if a goodly amount of alcohol had been consumed:

> When I was drunk I didn't care, I'd spout my politics at anyone. But when it came to being sober I'd be trying to avoid confrontation.
>
> I do know a couple of skins, when they walk on the street alone their bombers would come off and they'd flip them inside out and carry them until they got to their friends. Because they weren't ready to fight for what they were believing in.

A former skinhead also pointed out that while the skinheads would often go out with the explicit intent of causing trouble, there were other times when they would try to be more low-key and try to avoid conflict. A good example was at a bar that had skinhead bands on a regular basis. The member of the racist crew

didn't want to get barred from the club as these nights were a skinhead event of sorts, so they would be on their best behavior:

> You know, its just contradiction after contradiction. See, the politics are aside now because now we are skinheads, and this is where the skinheads are. But, tomorrow when the bar is over, our politics are back.

Skinheads and adult hate groups

The media and anti-racist interest groups tend to present skinheads as the "foot soldiers" of adult hate groups (Moore, 1993; Young and Craig, 1997; Best, 1999). The skinheads are seen as taking orders from the Aryan Nations, Ku Klux Klan or other adult leaders as part of a wider white power agenda. However, despite the wide acceptance of this view, it is based on some questionable assumptions.

The first of these assumptions is that skinheads and adult hate groups share the same agenda. While an examination of the ideologies formally espoused by both skinheads and adult hate groups may suggest that the two types of groups share the same goals, an examination of the actions and attitudes of individual racist skinheads suggests several points of contention.

Variation in ideological views

One implication of the foot-soldiers thesis would be that the skinheads are willing to work to further the agendas of the adult hate groups because they share the same ideology. While the issue if commitment to ideology among members of racist crews has already been raised in this paper, it needs some further explication here. It has already been established that some of the former

members of the crews claimed they were never particularly racist, thus we have evidence of ideological variation. There also seemed to be variation in the ideological beliefs of the current crew members. These different viewpoints were reflected in both their assessments of various common elements of white supremacist ideology, and in their assessments of other skinheads:

> I don't believe there is going to be a racial holy war. I don't believe that.
>
> I think there is probably some who are actually brainwashed enough to believe that there is going to be this war and that and that they actually want to be soldiers and believe in this Christian whatever they have lifestyle.

Who is the Enemy?

One particular issue that struck me was that in my interviews with skinheads the majority of the emphasis was on visible minorities. The skinheads seemed especially concerned with blacks. This concern seemed to be based on the idea that if blacks came to the skinheads' communities they would bring crime and general social decline:

> I've seen what happens what happens, like in (a nearby community) down there. That was once a nice community, now it's a fucking slum.
>
> If we see any of them (blacks) around here we want to know why. What their business is.
>
> There's a message, and the message is this neighborhood is for whites, it's off limits to niggers.

In contrast to the skinhead concern with blacks and other visible minorities, modern adult hate groups tend to focus on Jews as the primary threat to the white race (although there is an increasingly large anti-immigration

movement that has shifted some of the attention to the growing Hispanic immigrant population). Although some of the skinheads did mention the Jewish "menace" referred to as ZOG, or the Zionist Occupation Government, most of these comments sounded like someone regurgitating a memorized spiel:

> The Klan is not . . .They don't like muds, but they sort of accept them as being a class, the one thing they hate the most is Jews. So they don't want to waste their time on some guy that they took over on a banana boat 200 years ago when they're more concerned about . . .They think the Jews are in the banks taking our money.

While comments about visible minorities were tied to what seemed to be genuine experiences and opinions, none of the skinheads shared a story of personal mistreatment at the hands of Jews. The Jews only seemed to exist as part of a shadowy conspiracy to deprive them of their God given rights as white males. Several of the skinheads expressed a healthy skepticism about the emphasis the adult hate groups placed on Jews as the cause of society's problems:

> The Jews run the government? The ZOG? Whatever. I don't know, Bush ain't a Jew, he's from Texas.

> Those guys from [an adult hate group] were always on about the Jews, the Jews were doing this or that, the Jews owned Starbucks and they, they're you know, putting drugs in the coffee to control people, mind control, fucking stupid shit like that.

<u>Skepticism of Adult hate group ideology and values</u>

In 2002, Audie Wilson a reverend of the World Church of the Creator, and liaison to then leader, and current federal prison inmate, Matt Hale offered the

following explanation for why young people were attracted to white supremacist organizations:

> Many young whites are interested in our racialist politics because the church hides nothing about its beliefs or its expectations from members or supporters. The WCOTC is upfront its beliefs and many are coming to find that as the type of leadership they are willing to follow (Audie Wilson, personal communication, 2002).

The skinheads in my study did not seem to share Wilson's sentiments about white supremacist organizations. More than half of the skinheads I interviewed expressed some skepticism about adult hate groups that extended beyond their focus on the Jews. These reactions ranged from amused to cynical to downright hostile. The religious aspect of many of the adult hate groups was a particular target of criticism:

> I laugh every time I think about their little holiness of a bible (*The White man's Bible*), just total contradiction after contradiction . . .I was just sitting there laughing and stuff, how can anyone believe this?
>
> The Church of the Creator thing and the Identity thing, it didn't intrigue me because of the religious side of it. I don't know if they have some kind of weird rituals or something at night. I don't know what they do.
>
> The only thing I know about being a skinhead is that you fought for what you believed in. Just can't picture a bunch of skinheads and militia men sitting in church every Sunday. It doesn't seem like that's what I'd want to do.
>
> . . . they're a bunch of fucking morons who are giving skinheads a bad name. They're trying to be like this religious fucking born again Christian thing, but they're using skinheads as their identity.

Another source of skepticism was the notion that the adult hate groups were only using the skinheads to further the groups' own goals. Several skinheads felt that the adults did not like the skinheads, but only tolerated them because it was difficult to attract young people to the white supremacy

movement. There is a fairly large body of evidence that this is true. Influential movement figures such as former National Alliance leader Richard Butler publicly expressed distain for skinheads, and tried to limit their involvement in the National Alliance, which at the time was probably the country's leading white supremacist organization:

> They'd rather have, you know, a bunch of college kids, but what they got is us.
>
> I was at this rally and this, preacher I guess, is telling us how we were the flower of Aryan youth, yeah right, so I look around at all these drunken retards around me, and its, its kind of like when you tell an ugly chick she's hot to get in her pants. With those fuckers the skins are the ugly chicks and they just want to fuck us raw.

One of the former skinheads expressed a more sympathetic view of the position of the adult hate groups, ironically while suggesting that the adult groups would be unlikely to have a moral dilemma about jettisoning the skinheads if they outlived their usefulness:

> I think they'd (the adult hate groups) just sweep them (the skinheads) under the rug. As messed up as their values, most of them are family people, with a wife and kids. To a certain degree they're a decent person. Just their values are messed up. They're not going to want to have a society totally militarized by a bunch of shaved head guys running around the streets drinking all night.

<u>Tension between adult hate groups and skinheads</u>

The previous quote addresses an interesting question, how do the appearance and behaviors of skinheads fit into the agenda of adult hate groups. I asked one of the skinheads in my sample how typical skinhead behaviors, such as getting drunk, getting in street-fights and getting tattooed (Although I worded it differently) were furthering the cause of white-supremacy. He answered:

> That stuff is being worked out at the higher levels, we're on the street making shit happen.

I took this to mean that he had no idea how general skinhead behavior related to the goals of the white supremacy movement. Several of the former skinheads expressed the view that adult hate groups had a difficult relationship with skinheads, and many adult leaders viewed them as largely troublemakers who they were better off without. These former skinheads described the erratic, high profile, and often violent, behaviors of skinheads, as causing numerous problems for adult hate groups:

> When your main constituency is a group of 16, 17 to maybe 25 year old, you know, borderline alcoholics with firearms, they're going to get in trouble, and that trouble is going to be pretty easily traced back to you.

> This is an identity in which there really aren't too many influences which can be blamed. If somebody has all the records, all the theme posters, the swastikas, all over the wall, nobody is going to be looking at the fact they have a single mother to explain why they went out and did what they did.

The skinheads also had a tendency to flout the rules of the hate groups they belonged to. For an example of this we can go back to the previously mentioned skinheads who were part native-American. One of these skinheads tried to join an adult hate group with several other members of his crew. Another member of the crew describes the adult group's response:

> They wouldn't accept him because when they did their little chronological history on him they found out that there's part native in him, and they don't want that. So, they kicked him out.

Part of this rejection was supposed to involve the skinhead's crewmates who had been granted membership in the adult group ceasing contact with him as he was

not racially pure, and so not a suitable comrade. The skinheads completely ignored this directive, as they seemed to do with any directives they didn't feel like following and the skinhead in question remained a member of the crew.

Fluidity of ideology (constantly changing)

Another point of disconnection between the skinheads and the adult hate groups is the tendency of skinheads to be ideologically fluid. While in some more extreme cases this might mean switching back and forth between racist and non-political, or even anti-racist groups, it more commonly involved switching from one type of racist ideology to another. For example, a decade ago many skinheads who were affiliated with ideologies that had a religious bent were adherents of Christian Identity. Today many skinheads are attracted to neo-paganism, especially in the form of Odinism, the worship of the ancient Norse gods, specifically Odin and Thor:

> Now a lot of the skinheads are Odinists, they totally believe in Scandinavian mythology. My roommate was an Odinist. He had no upbringing of any god, his parents didn't make him believe in god. Here is a god in mythology that is totally based on power and who is white, and who is big and strong, so why not?

While the skinheads see no problem with switching from ideology to ideology within a general white power framework, the adult hate groups are ideologically rigid. Most are based around a specific ideology. For example the Aryan Nations is based on the ideology of Christian Identity, and as skinheads have become increasingly attracted to Odinism and other non-Christian belief systems the popularity of the Aryan Nations among skinheads has waned:

> The groups come and go. I know WAR [the White Aryan Resistance] is gone, and I thought Aryan Nations was gone, but I think they're still going.

Views of the future of the white supremacy movement

The skinheads expressed a variety of views relating to the future of the white supremacy movement. A few stressed that the white supremacists were making gains and that it wouldn't be long before there were big changes in society:

> It is totally like Tom Metzger said. When he came out of court he said a statement that sticks in a lot of people's minds that people sort of shunned off, by saying that we are in your police departments and we are in your fire departments and we are in your schools and we are in your law firms. And it is true. It is so true.
>
> Something big is coming, things will change.

Most of the skinheads didn't seem to have given any real consideration to the possibility the white supremacists might actually succeed in either seizing power or establishing a separate homeland. A great example of Merton's concept of the ritualist, these skinheads seemed to assume they would continue in very much the same manner and not much would change. I asked one of the former skinheads if he thought that the white supremacist movement would ever die out and he gave the following answer:

> It will keep on until [the white supremacist groups] control the world then I am sure it will be a case of infighting and there will be another group that will have the urge to control the world.

Another former skinhead suggested that many of the white supremacists he had met were more interested in talking than fighting and that if it came down to a real conflict, these "leaders" would be the first to abandon the fight:

> But I think even, even if they had the numbers, if it came down to actually having to fight, most of them wouldn't. I think you'd see a lot of people back down.

Becoming a Skinhead

Adopting the Skinhead Style

Some sociologists have used the term conversion to describe the transition from one primary social identity to another (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1985). The majority of the respondents had previously held other identities tied to their involvement in different subcultures. Some had been punk rockers or into heavy metal music. Others had been skateboarders. All had been attracted to the skinhead subculture and had converted from the subcultures with which they had previously been involved. The process of conversion generally involved leaving behind friends and activities that did not fit in with being a skinhead:

> When you're younger, when you're a kid it's an identity thing. Its like, I got into being a skinhead because I didn't like the Mohawk and I didn't like the ripped-up jeans. I liked the bomber, I liked the shaved head, I liked the boots, I liked the music, and I liked the idea that when I walked down the street people were always nervous because you were a skinhead.

For many of the respondents, whether they initially entered the skinhead subculture as racist skinheads or whether they developed a racist identity later on, it seems to have been an attraction to the skinhead image, rather than ideological concerns that drove their decision to become a skinhead:

> In some ways it's a little youth group, a place for people to have a good time and to make them look tough. I mean, that is why we did it, I know that is why I did it, because I had a sense of inferiority and that is a group of people, very militant looking, very tough looking.
>
> People just want to be tough and they want to be cool.
>
> We liked to romantic side of being tough and going out with the boys and doing a little fighting and stuff. It was just, it was a group of kids.

> The whole skinhead movement, regardless of what political side you have is an intimidation thing. It's strength through numbers and it's your style. You've got the military haircut, the bombers; you want that sense of intimidation.
>
> When you're a kid you don't really understand what hatred is. They don't understand what it is, so it is totally for the look. I became a skinhead for the look.

Other skinheads said that being a skinhead appealed to them because it provided an outlet for pent up aggression:

> When I started getting really angry, see I liked it because, the whole violence thing is what got me closer to it. I was an abused child, I was angry, they're angry. That's how we sort of connected.
>
> My whole background was violence and why I got so high strung and stuff was my alcoholism and the fact I had a rough childhood growing up.

Very much in the minority were those who said that they became a skinhead for reasons of race. One former skinhead described how he joined the skinheads because he thought society was treating white males in general and himself in particular, unfairly. He also mentioned how flawed his logic was:

> All they had to do to get me on their side was tell me that I couldn't get in the fire department because I'm white (a reference to affirmative action). And the fact that I didn't have a drivers license and I had a criminal record, those were put aside.

Influential Others

> I got involved with the skinheads when I was 12 or 13. I got involved in it through the music, mostly the Cockney Rejects. At the time I didn't know much about it until I got introduced to some older skins who hung out downtown.

Research suggests that direct contact with skinheads seems to be an important factor in the decision to become a skinhead (Smith, 2000; Blazak, 2001). When former skinheads have described the process by which they

became skinheads they often mention relatives or friends who had previously adopted the skinhead style as important influences. As with other deviant groups it is likely that factors such as frequency and intensity of contact play a role in the process of adopting the deviant identity (Sutherland and Cressey, 1966). Aho (1990) observed that people who joined right-wing patriot groups often had family or friends who were already involved with those groups. Aho also noted that a social bond to a person already in the group seemed to be a more important factor in the decision to join than a preexisting belief in the goals of the group.

All of the respondents had had contact with skinheads before they themselves became skinheads. Some had had family members or friends who were already skinheads. Others were exposed to skinheads through involvement in the punk rock scene. In the latter case conversion was generally not immediate but rather the potential convert began spending an increasing amount of time with his new skinhead friends and eventually began to adopt the dress and self-identify as a skinhead.

Low Barriers to Entry

In his ethnography of Australian skinheads *The Lads in Action* David Moore describes the skinhead subculture as having a visual style that can be attained with relatively little expense. He contrasts the cost of a pair of Dr. Marten's boots and a haircut with the much more expensive accessories required to be a biker or a surfer (Moore, 1994). While Moore focuses on the relative expense of involvement in each of these subcultures, one might also note that a biker or a surfer must invest a significant amount of time to become proficient

enough on a motorcycle or a surfboard to gain the respect of peers. As the result of the expense of the needed equipment and the investment of time required to learn how to use it, both the biker and surfer subcultures can be said to have relatively high barriers to entry. In contrast the skinhead subculture has a relatively low barrier to entry since no special skills are needed.

For a racist skinhead the most important attributes are being white and male. If a person has those qualities and can scrape together enough money to get their head shaved and buy a pair of appropriate boots they have already met the most basic requirements for involvement in the subculture.

When a subculture has low barriers to entry it allows people more freedom to try out the identity without a large amount of personal investment. While this may encourage people to try out the identity it also allows people to leave without much lost if they find the subculture is not to their liking. The respondents in my sample reported that in the lower echelons of the skinhead scene people were always coming and going and that for this reason newcomers were not taken too seriously until they had been around the scene for a while.

Joining a Crew

Paths into the Crew

Adopting the skinhead style and becoming part of a skinhead crew are two different things. Shaving one's head, putting on boots and self-identifying as a tough skinhead is different than having this identity accepted by other, already established skinheads. Previous research suggests that when those new to the skinhead scene try to present themselves as cool or tough they often face

greater obstacles than those who admit to their novice status (Moore, 1994; Smith, 2000).

People gained membership in the skinhead crews in a number of different ways. The most common way was having a relative or friend who was already a member of the crew. This provided an opportunity to interact with crew members on a fairly regular basis and become known to them. In many of these cases the relative or friend who introduced the skinhead to members of the crew was the same person who influenced the adoption of skinhead style. Other people were members of the larger skinhead scene and began to socialize with a particular crew with increasing frequency. Once a person becomes a regular in the crew's social circle they may become fully involved in the activities of the crew if none of the current crew members object. At this point decision to become a crew member is in the hands of the potential joiner and may be influenced by a variety of concerns including existing membership in another crew, an unwillingness to openly identify as a racist or a disinterest in anything but a social relationship with the crew.

Becoming a Crew Member

When a new person started hanging around with the members of a crew there was a period of assessment:

> They'd kind of feel you out.
>
> At first you'd hang around and we probably wouldn't say much around you. You'd need to build up a trust with us. You might have to do a few things to prove we can trust you.

During this time the crew members would tease and harass the newcomer, in essence this was a form of hazing meant to weed out those who couldn't take it, and especially those who didn't recognize their place in the order of things:

> Some kids want to be tough guys right away, but, you're going to get teased and pushed around, hazed, early on. If you can't deal with that you aren't going to be around for long.
>
> You've sort of got to get your initiation.

While the crew members did employ verbal and physical hazing to test newcomers there was no particular planning involved. Each crew member decided to what extent they would harass newcomers and often the most vigorous hazing came after the consumption of large amounts of alcohol. Verbal and physical sparring were also common among established crew members, so in a sense the hazing served to provide the novice with a sense of what to expect as a member of the crew.

The type of hazing that occurred in the skinhead crews was markedly different from the much more elaborate hazing that occurs in some other settings. For example, the initiation rites employed by some college fraternities are much more extensive. Fraternity pledges have reported acts of humiliation and abuse including being forced to wear diapers and make-up, having Ben-Gay applied to their genitals, and being doused with buckets of feces. In addition to these humiliating acts, there are often rituals like mock burials and hangings that simulate the end of the life before membership in the fraternity (Sanday, 1990). Outlaw motorcycle gangs have also developed elaborate rituals to symbolize a new member's entry into the gang. After a period of what amounts

to servitude to the members of the gang, new members go through a grueling initiation. Such initiations often include the initiates being forcibly stripped naked and then being covered in a mixture of urine, feces and oil (Wolf, 1992; Thompson, 1966). These rituals are designed to create a strong bond between the Outlaw Club and the new member. "The initiate dies as a member of straight society and is reborn as a Rebel. The physical beating and hazing symbolizes the subjugation of the individual to the dictates of the group" (Wolf, 1992: 114).

The types of elaborate initiation rites used by fraternities and outlaw motorcycle clubs are not seen in skinhead crews. One major reason is probably the relative lack of organization in the crews. Elaborate initiation rituals require collective effort on the part of those already in the group. Often such rituals are rooted in a group's traditions and codified in the formal rules of the organization. Since the skinhead groups had little in the way of established formal rules there was no fixed procedure for dealing with new members. The lack of a collective focus on initiation into the group extended to the point that even simple initiation rituals that required very limited planning were uncommon. For example, the initiation ritual used by many urban gangs of having several members beat up a prospective member, a practice often referred to as beating-in a member, was not commonly practiced by any of the skinhead crews represented in the study.

The individual approach to hazing new members creates a situation where each person's experience of joining the crew is different. In some cases the respondents reported virtually no hazing while other members of the same crew reported extensive harassment from certain members. One respondent reported

having been locked in the trunk of a car and left for a few hours. Both the randomness of the skinheads' approach to hazing, and the lack of a shared initiation experience may serve to limit the members' sense that they earned a place in the group. Compared to outlaw bikers, fraternity brothers, or urban gang members the skinheads endure relatively little hardship to gain membership in a crew.

Racist Influences in the Crew

Some skinheads suggested that they had originally joined the crew because they were looking for skinheads to hang out with rather than for ideological reasons, but that the racist aspects of the crew did influence their thinking over time:

> I fully believe it's just a sense of belonging. But you get so deep and you start believing it.

James Aho (1990) reported similar findings while researching right-wing extremists in Idaho. "[M]any confess at first to have been revolted by the Identity message or Constitutionalism. Rather, they "joined with" others already in the movement and only later began articulating its dogma" (1990:187). It seems that people are often drawn into extremist groups due to their attachments to others, rather than by the ideology of the group.

Crew Activities

Hanging Out

One of the main activities of the crews was socializing. However entire crews did not tend to gather on a frequent basis. Various sub-sets of members would generally gather at defined places and times. For younger skinheads the

gathering point might be a city park, fast food restaurant or a coffee shop. For older skinheads it was generally a bar. The choice to meet up with other skinheads on these occasions was also constrained by other demands on a crew member's time. Most of the skinheads worked or attended school or college. Some also had girlfriends who were not part of the scene and thus had to split their time between friends and girlfriend. The occasions that the majority of crew members would come together were house parties, or if a band of interest to the skinheads was playing in the area.

Within each crew there were a number of smaller social groups usually made up of between two and four crew members. These smaller groups tended to have stronger ties to each other than to the rest of the crew and they would associate with one another more frequently than with other crew members. In their work on urban gangs Decker and Van Winkle observed a similar phenomenon, that larger gangs were an amalgamation of smaller "subgroups" with much closer social ties (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Members of the subgroups of the skinhead crews were more likely to spend time hanging out together.

When skinheads are hanging out they are not actively looking for a fight. While incidents of violence with outsiders certainly do occur while the skinheads are hanging out, the other party will usually be blamed for starting the trouble. One crew member contrasted his crew with the local SHARP skinheads by saying that his crew often liked to just have a drink, but that the SHARP skinheads were always looking for a fight:

> They [the SHARP skinheads] will attack people they see who they think might be [white] power. It's not like we go after everybody we think might be SHARP. It'd be nice to have a drink without worrying if those assholes are going to jump you.

Alcohol and Dug Use

Most of the respondents identified alcohol consumption as a central element of socializing with other skinheads. When asked what skinheads did when they got together the following quotes were typical of the responses:

> Hang out, drink beer.
>
> We'd go drinking.

Drinking and especially drinking beer is an important feature of the skinhead subculture. Young and Craig suggest that skinheads drink beer because it is inexpensive and as a working-class cache (Young and Craig, 1997). Among the respondents beer was the drink of choice although other types of alcohol were also consumed.

A skinhead's ability to drink large amounts of alcohol was a source of pride. A "good drinker" was a skinhead who could drink for long periods of time without becoming incapacitated. A skinhead who became visibly drunk, vomited or passed out was often the subject of scorn and ridicule:

> You couldn't puke because real men can hold their liquor. So you'd get guys holding it in, there'd be like drool running down their chin. I yelled at a guy at a party for puking all over my bathroom, and he was like "I didn't puke!" A bunch of people saw him do it but he wouldn't admit that he puked.

Drugs besides alcohol were less common. Early research on skinheads suggested that they eschewed the use of illegal drugs (Hamm, 1993; Kinsella,

1994). Other research suggests that skinheads use a variety of drugs (Wooden, 1995; Baron, 1997; Finnegan, 1998). The comments of the respondents on the subject of drug use illustrated a separation between the ideal and real worlds of the skinheads. Many respondents mentioned that drug use was not considered to be a part of the skinhead lifestyle and was looked down on:

> Basically pot was a no-no and hash too, because only hippies smoked that stuff and we didn't want any hippies in our group.
>
> Well that was one of the rules, you didn't do drugs and you worked.

Despite the general consensus that drug use went against the basic rules of being a racist skinhead many of the respondents reported that they or other skinheads they knew used a variety of drugs:

> The only drug that was kind of accepted was speed, because speed allowed you to drink more, because drinking was accepted and the more you drank the more of a skinhead man you were, and it got your adrenaline going so you probably wouldn't lose a fight.
>
> It was a no-no to smoke pot, but we would smoke pot anyway.
>
> Some of them are doing steroids which totally fries their minds. You can tell the guy on steroids. He is the guy who is freaking out in any type of confrontation.
>
> Nowadays they're all doing coke and they're smoking up and they're doing LSD. They don't care now.

The use of illegal drugs by members of a crew was personal behavior. While members of the smaller subgroups might use drugs together, this type of behavior was rarely seen when a larger number of crew members gathered together. As long as an individual's drug use did not become seen as a problem it was largely ignored.

Causing Trouble

Sometimes the crew members set out to engage in behavior intended to provoke, bully or hurt people outside the crew. These events can be differentiated from situations that occur when the crew is not intentionally trying to cause trouble. Some examples of deliberately setting out causing trouble included: Heading to a park known as a homosexual meeting place to spray people with squirt-guns full of bleach. Going to punk concerts where left-wing or anti-racist bands are playing to heckle the bands and harass people in the crowd. Going to bars or clubs where members of the crew are already barred and harassing staff and patrons. These types of activities were less frequent than getting together to hang out, and when they did occur often involved only part of the crew.

Leaving the Crew

People leave skinhead crews for a variety of reasons. Some decide the skinhead subculture is no longer for them. Others want to distance themselves from white-supremacist ideology. Still others find continued involvement with the crew incompatible with other aspects of their lives.

Aging Out

Although tenure in the skinhead scene is a major source of status, there is a point at which the older crew members age out of the crew and move on to other things:

> Yeah, I think that is what inevitably happens. I don't think you'll find any skinheads over 35 who are still big names.

> It's not that I don't feel that I draw my identity through the scene I was involved in, but, I got other things in life. Can't be a kid forever.

Older skinheads face a variety of hardships if they remain part of a crew. The consequences of being involved in violence are more severe than those they faced when they were younger. This is especially true for those skinheads who have amassed a lengthy criminal record over the years. Older skinheads tended to have to rest on their laurels, relating stories of past adventures:

> Once you get to a certain point you can't be the fighter any more, you have to use your mind instead of your fists.

The emphasis on heavy alcohol consumption in the skinhead subculture can also create difficulties. Regular patterns of heavy drinking can bring skinheads into conflict with serious girlfriends or wives, although some partners didn't seem to mind as long as the skinhead was able to meet his family and work obligations. For example, I heard of several wives who ferried their intoxicated husbands to and from bars but did not take part in socializing, or even enter the bars, themselves.

Several former crew members reported that as they got older they felt an increasing distance between the realities of their daily lives and the activities of the crew. Careers, wives or girlfriends, and in some cases children, began to take up an increasing amount of time. Some feared that continuing to engage in crew related activities would threaten their job security or their family life:

> You want to hang out with guys in their late twenties, starting families, settled down, instead of hanging out with a gang of 15 year olds who want to create a reputation by going out and picking fights or swarming people.

Dropping Out

Skinheads leave the crew for a variety of reasons. Leaving was most common among the younger skinheads, some of whom only spent a few months in the crew before leaving. Many of these youths abandoned not only the crew but the entire skinhead subculture. At this stage there could be many reasons for leaving the crew. The most commonly suggested reason was that those who left were not cut out for the skinhead lifestyle:

> When someone leaves it's because they're a pussy and they don't belong here.
>
> You get a lot of copycats, all look, no balls.
>
> Some guys, I guess, weren't cut out for it.

Once a skinhead had been in a crew for a while and had proven himself to have the required attributes, the reasons for leaving changed. The most commonly mentioned reason for leaving at this juncture was a desire to distance oneself from the white supremacist aspect of the crew:

> If you left on your own I would be mostly be because of a change in ideology or something.
>
> Sort of looking to escape from political ideology.
>
> You had to be into the white power thing, so a lot of guys just got out of that and didn't come back.

Conflicts with other crew members also played a role in people leaving the crew. One respondent told me that the skinheads "always turn on each other" creating rifts in the crew and causing people to leave. Other respondents said

that it was uncommon for crew members to leave because of in-group conflicts, although it did occasionally happen:

> I never really noticed too many problems in the entire crew. I mean I know people didn't always get along and there were fights, but as a group of people they were surprisingly never really that dysfunctional a group.

Some former skinheads said they had left the crew for personal reasons. Several mentioned problems related to alcohol and drugs. One former skinhead said he drifted away from both his crew and the skinhead subculture in favor of a new group of friends who more readily facilitated his increasing drug use. Another former skinhead left the group to deal with his alcohol abuse problem:

> It wasn't until I fucked up enough that I had to quit drinking that I realized; okay; now I got to get out of this situation.

Consequences of Leaving the Crew

Some early media stories on skinheads offer accounts of violence against people who tried to leave the crew. My respondents reported that the crews did not retaliate against ex-members who simply left the crew. A former crew member was more likely to raise the ire of the remaining crew members if he became an outspoken ant-racist, or joined a rival crew:

> A few people leave and then I think the ones who get revenge attacks are probably the ones who wander out the next weekend after denouncing everything and run into a group of skins and get attacked. That's what's going to happen.
>
> When someone left there was this talk of the day of the rope where every traitor to the white revolution would be hanged, but I think those were just sort of casual threats of violence being thrown around.
>
> If you want to get out, you can get out.

The respondents agreed that an ex-skinhead had more to fear from those outside the crew. While the skinhead was part of the crew he had some

measure of protection from his enemies. Skinheads who left had to contend alone with people who were aware of their past:

> Maybe one or two people would want to beat you up, but that's nothing because you got, you know, hundreds of people who want to beat you up because you were into white power.
>
> I worry more about people that are holding grudges against me just from the way I drank and acted than I am about skinheads beating me up.

Skinheads who left the crew were faced with a fundamental problem of identity. The years they had invested in the subculture had very little currency in other parts of society. Both the visible markers of their skinhead identity, such as tattoos, and the more abstract aspects, such as their reputation, have little meaning outside of the skinhead subculture:

> There isn't much reward, you know, satisfaction, outside the group.

Former skinheads can grow their hair, but the conspicuous tattoos that many are covered with are harder to conceal and often mark the owner as a skinhead:

> I've been criticized for having my crucified skin [tattoo] on my arm, just for being a skinhead in my younger days . . . You always have to explain yourself.
>
> I used to love it when people looked at me, at my tats and thought I'd been in prison, I was like a tough guy. Now I hate it.

Some former skinheads want to erase all traces of their former life and go through painful tattoo removal treatments. These individuals tend to reject the ideology and values of the skinheads and seek a return to a more conventional

life. Some of the respondents suggested that these were the individuals who had the lowest level of commitment to the group during their time in the crew:

> That's an example, He's just one of those guys that it was cool to be one because people looked at you differently, and people feared you. But 4 or 5 years later, when he wanted to get out, he had to spend an awful lot of money to get that big tattoo off his chest.

Some former skinheads moved on to other subcultures with values similar to the skinhead subculture. One reason for such conversions was that these new subcultures lacked the overt racist aspect of the skinhead subculture allowing the convert to become apolitical. One popular conversion was to the identity of a rockabilly or greaser. This is a subculture heavily influenced by 1950's American music and fashion. Because members of the rockabilly subculture often have extensive tattooing, ex-skinheads fit right in. This particular conversion is relatively common, and some respondents jokingly referred to it as "the skinhead retirement plan."

Discussion

One thing that stuck me when I initially reviewed the interviews was how little immediate insight they offered about why skinheads are violent. I had learned that fighting was an important part of the subculture and that it was linked to status. The responses seemed to echo David Moore's (1994) argument that fighting is so central to skinhead identity that a person cannot be a skinhead if he doesn't fight. This is hardly a satisfying explanation, and yet it has utility in helping us to understand skinhead violence. A subculture that puts so much emphasis on fighting requires enemies. The skinhead subculture was a product of the tough working class neighborhoods of England. In those environs the

skinheads had plenty of rivals including, supporters of rival soccer teams, members of other subcultures, and skinheads from other neighborhoods. Skinheads in North America are part of a very different culture than that in which the subculture originated.

Because fighting is so much a part of the skinhead subculture it is tempting to subscribe to the notion that it attracts people with violent tendencies. I found some support for this idea. Some of the skinheads reported that they had been attracted to the skinhead subculture because they liked to fight or because they were angry. This anger may be attributable to background factors as roughly half of these youths had parents who were divorced, and some had been physically and emotionally abused. It is also notable that many of the skinheads stated that they believed that the public perception of skinheads was shaped by fear, and that this is part of what attracted them to the subculture, a desire to intimidate others.

My findings suggest that racist skinheads strive to present a cohesive front to the world. They identify themselves as a distinct entity through the use of shared style and symbols. Similar behavior has been reported among members of other deviant groups including outlaw motorcycle clubs (Wolf, 1992), urban gangs (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996) and groups of punk rockers (Kennedy and Baron, 1993).

The public front of unity presented by the skinhead crews serves to obscure the fact that the crews are made up of individuals. The members of the crews encompassed a variety of personalities, attitudes, and family backgrounds.

The crewmembers also varied in the degree to which they held white supremacist beliefs and were involved with adult white supremacist organizations.

The crews all had a similar social structure. The crews did not have a formal hierarchy but instead had an informal hierarchy based on respect. Respect was primarily a product of length of tenure in the subculture, and the extent to which a skinhead had developed his reputation as a good fighter and a good drinker.

The members of the skinhead crews shared organizational ties, but also had close relational ties as they spent a fair amount of time involved in collective social activities. Relational ties tended to be strongest among those who shared a relatively equal hierarchical position in the crew. The skinheads were also socially unconventional in terms of both appearance and ideology. They are more similar to one another than to most other people in society. All of these factors serve to create multifaceted social bonds between the members of a crew.

Despite the multifaceted bonds nature of the bonds connecting a skinhead to a crew, these bonds were only as strong as a skinhead's commitment to the crew. This was a function of the voluntary nature of involvement in both the skinhead subculture and a given crew. Younger skinheads who refused to accept the established order of things were unlikely to last long in the subculture. The voluntary acceptance of the established order by newcomers to the subculture seemed to play a significant role in maintaining the subculture's

characteristics over time. However, since involvement was largely on a voluntary basis, dissatisfaction could lead an individual to sever ties to a crew, or to the subculture as a whole. Part of the reason for this is that while the skinheads were dependent on fellow crew members for friendship, partisanship, and maintenance of their skinhead identity, the crew members were functionally independent in matters of practical reality such as income. This could be contrasted with urban gang members who might rely on one another for income through collective involvement in drug dealing or other criminal activities. In the latter case, leaving the gang also means abandoning one's source of income. For a skinhead leaving a crew, or the subculture, would have primarily social ramifications. If a skinhead becomes dissatisfied with a crew or the subculture there isn't much to keep them from leaving.

The Social Structure of the Crews

The defining features of the crews from a structural standpoint were the multifaceted social ties between crewmembers, the informal hierarchy and the lack of functional dependence between crewmembers. Crewmembers shared cultural ties based on their involvement in the skinhead subculture, organizational ties based on their involvement in a crew, and relational ties based on frequent socialization with other crew members. The informal hierarchy of the crews defined the older guys as having higher status than the younger guys. The members of the crew did not engage in any collective economic activities, and so can be considered to be functionally independent.

Researchers have used Black's formulations to show that the social structure of an organization determines the forms of conflict management that are used to handle disputes (Morrill, 1989, 1992, 1995; Tucker, 1989, 1993, 1999; Baumgartner, 1992). Given the multifaceted social ties among the crewmembers I would expect conflicts with outsiders to be characterized by violent conflict handling. The social ties between the crewmembers should serve to promote partisanship against outsiders, encouraging the use of violence. Conflicts within the crew would be expected to be largely between equals as the hierarchical structure of the crew should serve to limit upward directed conflicts. The lack of functional dependence between crewmembers may lead to the use of avoidance as a conflict management strategy.

In the following two chapters the nature and handling of conflicts will be discussed. In the next chapter the relationship between crew structure and conflicts with outsiders will be examined. In chapter 6 the management of conflict inside the crews will be explored.

CHAPTER 5

OUT-GROUP CONFLICTS

The skinheads in my sample were involved in conflicts with a variety of types of people. About 25% of the conflicts occurred between members of the same skinhead crew. I will describe these intra-crew conflicts in the next chapter. The remaining 75% of conflicts were with people outside the crew and it is the characteristics of these out-group conflicts that will be discussed in this chapter.

Skinhead attacks on minorities are a well documented fact. However, it is important to consider the wide range of sources that indicate that a large amount of skinhead violence does not involve victims of other races, ethnicities or sexual orientations (Baron, 1997; SPLC, 1998[1]; Dirmann, 1999; Smith, 2000). This raises questions about who the victims of skinhead violence are, and why skinheads act violently toward them. One way to address these questions is to shift the focus from violence per se to conflicts.

The advantage of using the conflict as the unit of analysis is that this limits the tendency to focus entirely on the most basic characteristics of the parties in a conflict. Instead we can consider a range of observable factors including the source of the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the principal parties and the behavior of other parties who are present. By examining the social

structure of a conflict, factors can be identified that either promote or mediate violence.

Second Party Characteristics in Out-group Conflicts

Minority Status

When describing the characteristics of individuals who come into conflict with skinheads, an obvious place to start is with minority status. Racial and ethnic minorities, as well as homosexuals are often described as primary targets of skinhead violence. Table 5.1 presents a breakdown of the perceived minority status of the other party or parties involved in a conflict. If a conflict involved at least one principal party who was perceived to be a minority, it was coded as a conflict involving minorities.

Table 5.1: Perceived Minority Status (N=158 cases)

Minority Status	Percent	Frequency
Racial or Ethnic	13%*	21*
Homosexual	3%	5
None	84%	132

* This number includes an individual who was both a visible minority and a homosexual.

As the above table illustrates the large majority of conflicts did not involve people who were perceived to be part of a minority group. Eight skinheads each described 2 cases of conflict involving minorities, accounting for 62% of all such cases. Overall, 17 of the 30 skinheads interviewed (57%) described at least one conflict involving one or more members of a racial or ethic minority group. Six skinheads (20%) reported conflicts involving homosexuals. The other parties involved in conflicts with the skinheads were most likely to be other young white males. This was the case in 77% of all out-group conflicts (this percentage excludes young white males who were perceived by the skinheads to be

homosexuals). Ten conflicts representing 6% of the total number involved non-minority adults or teenage females.

Relationship between Principal Parties

Another important factor to consider is the social relationship between the parties involved in a conflict. People involved in conflicts with skinheads ranged from those with close relationships to the skinheads, such as family members and romantic partners, to strangers. The breakdown of conflict cases by the relationship between the parties involved can be seen in table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Relationship between Principal Parties (N=158 cases)

Relationship	Percent	Frequency
Strangers	46%	72
Acquaintances	36%	57
Associates	6%	9
Friends	4%	7
Romantic Partners	3%	4
Family Members	2%	3
Unknown Relationship	4%	6

As the above table illustrates, the parties in the conflict were known to one another in about half of the conflicts. Among the non-stranger categories, conflicts with acquaintances were most commonly described, comprising 36% of the cases. This category included people who were known to the skinheads but did not have close social ties to them. The low percentages of conflicts involving friends or associates can be at least partly explained by the limited social circles in which many skinheads operate. Their friends tend to be members of their crew. The frequency and nature of conflicts among crew members will be addressed in the next chapter.

Subcultural Affiliation

When skinheads are discussed in the context of their racism and hate crimes, their place in the mosaic of youth subcultures is often ignored. In contrast, when researchers examine the relationship between skinheads and other youth subcultures a pattern of interaction and often rivalry emerges (Blazak, 1995; Baron, 1997; Wood, 1999; Wooden and Blazak, 2001). These rivalries provide another potential source of conflict for skinheads.

Table 5.3: Subcultural Affiliation of Other Parties (N=158)

Subculture	Percent	Frequency
None	42%	67
Skinhead	38%	60
Other Subculture	20%*	31*

* This number includes an individual who was both a visible minority and part of a subculture.

Affiliation with a subculture proved to be a characteristic of a majority of the conflicts. Ninety-two cases or 58% of the conflicts described by the skinheads involved other parties with a recognized subcultural affiliation. In 66% of the conflicts where the other party had a subcultural affiliation, the other party was also a skinhead. In the other 34% of cases the other party belonged to another subculture.

Handling Out-Group Conflicts

Predominating Techniques for Handling Conflicts

When the skinheads I studied became involved in a conflict with someone outside their crew they tended to handle the conflict violently. Violent conflict management was employed in 63% of the out-group conflicts. Inaction, or choosing not to respond to a perceived provocation or offense, was the next

most common behavior occurring in 12% of conflicts. Avoidance was also employed as a method of handling conflicts. Avoidance involves intentionally avoiding people you do not wish to interact with. Avoidance was employed in 9% of conflicts.

Uncommon Methods of Conflict Handling

Types of conflict management that involved compromise were used very infrequently. Negotiation, the resolution of a conflict by reaching a mutually acceptable solution, was employed in 3% of conflicts.

Conflicts with Minorities

Characteristics of Minorities

Visible minority groups involved in the conflicts included African Americans, Arabs, and Asians. Six conflicts involved homosexuals. In most cases members of minority groups who were involved in conflicts with skinheads had no prior relationship with the skinheads. In minority cases where the relationship between the parties was known, 96% of the cases involved strangers. Among the cases were the other parties were described as white and not identified as homosexual, 37% of the conflicts involved strangers.

Table 5.4: Characteristics of Minority Principal Parties (N=26)

Type of Minority	Percent	Frequency
Visible Minority	81%* **	21* **
Homosexual	19%	5

* This number includes an individual who was both a visible minority and a homosexual.
** This number includes an individual who was both a visible minority and part of a subculture.

Sources of Conflict

Displays of unprovoked violence were more common in conflicts with minorities than in conflicts with other types of strangers. Among the minority

conflicts 50% involved violent action by the skinheads based primarily on the minority characteristics of the other parties. In these conflicts the skinheads were using the logic of collective liability where any member of a social category is viewed as accountable for the perceived sins of the category as a whole. In contrast, among non-minority strangers who were not perceived to be homosexuals, 10% of conflicts involved violent bullying.

In one instance skinheads went to a park known as a place frequented by homosexual males looking for anonymous sex. They then proceed to spray anyone they thought was a homosexual with super-soaker water pistols filled with bleach. In another instance Joe and Mark, two skinheads, were walking home after playing basketball when they encountered a young Asian male:

> This chink is walking by and I go like I'm going to throw the ball at him. Scared him. Well, he stops and gives us a dirty look. So I shoved him and was like "what are you going to do about it! "And Mark is like" yeah, what are you gonna do chink" and kicks the guy. I think he was pretty scared, we ran him off.

When minorities were intentionally targeted the motivation was not always entirely ideological. In several cases at least part of the motivation for targeting homosexuals was economic gain. The practice of robbing homosexuals, or "rolling fags" as some of the skinheads described it, involved using one of the crew as 'bait' to lure a victim to a secluded place where they would be beaten and robbed. The proceeds from these robberies were generally used to purchase beer for collective consumption:

> One time we didn't have much cash so we got Johnny to go into this gay bar and this guy buys him a drink, and Johnny tells the guy he has a place just down the street, so the guy comes with him. We roughed him up

> pretty good, took all his shit. . . You Know, wallet, keys. We just took the keys to be mean.

The crew members also described some conflicts with minorities as being a reaction to behavior they felt was disrespectful or offensive. In these cases it was the individual who was said to have provoked the skinheads:

> In one incident, two skinheads were waiting for their girlfriends at a movie theatre. When the girls arrived they said that a black man outside the theatre had made lewd comments to them. The skinheads confronted the man, who denied saying anything. The two skinheads proceed to physically assault the man by knocking him to the ground and kicking him repeatedly, then fled the scene.

Responding to a specific grievance was identified as the cause of 23% of the conflicts. In another 8% of conflicts the crew member was responding to a physical attack. In these latter cases the skinheads were attacked by young members of racial minorities who identified them as racists.

Frequency of Violence

Violence was employed in 62% of the conflicts involving minorities. Of the cases handled violently, 38% were reported to have resulted in no injury to the other party, 25% in minor injury and 38% in serious injury. Avoidance was used to handle 23% of the conflicts.

Third Party Behavior

Third parties were involved in 92% of the conflicts between skinheads and minorities. The numbers of third parties involved in the majority of these conflicts was small, with 1 to 3 third parties being involved in 70% of the conflicts. In 81% of the conflicts skinhead third parties were present. The third parties involved in

these conflicts were characterized by their lack of cross-cutting ties. Third parties had exclusive social ties to one side or the other in all of the conflicts involving third parties.

Social Ties and Third Party Behavior. When other skinheads were present during conflicts with minorities they displayed a high level of partisanship. In 65% of conflicts there were other skinheads present who acted as partisans. Partisanship was not limited to skinheads. In 35% of the conflicts the other party in the conflict had supporters who acted as partisans. In all cases where third parties became involved on the behalf of the second parties, the conflicts involved racial minorities. Conflicts with homosexuals generally took place in isolated areas where no help was available.

In a few cases third parties with no ties to either side became involved in the conflict. In one instance an intoxicated skinhead was expelled from a bar with for trying to smuggle in contraband beer under his jacket. The skinhead reacted by screaming a stream of racial slurs at one of the bouncers who was black. This angered a large black passerby who punched the skinhead in the face knocking him to the ground. In another case a group of skinheads were harassing a mixed-race couple in a public area. Several people intervened on behalf of the couple, including two adult males, causing the skinheads to leave. Such cases were not typical. In a large majority of cases partisans had relational ties to the party they were supporting.

Conflicts with Other Skinheads

Characteristics of Other Skinheads

Table 5.5: Relationship between Skinhead Principal Parties (N=60)

Relationship	Percent	Frequency
Acquaintances	57%	34
Associates	15%	9
Friends	10%	6
Romantic Partners	5%	3
Strangers	13%	8

Sources of Conflict

When details about the source of the conflict were known 34% were primarily group-centered conflicts, while 66% were personal conflicts. The most common type of personal conflict involved a crewmember responding to behavior he found disrespectful or offensive. This was the source of 49% of personal conflicts. In contrast, group-centered conflicts were a product of both subcultural values and rivalries.

Territoriality. Skinhead crews are not strongly territorial in the way that many urban gangs are. One exception to this may be some skinhead crews on the West Coast that have become involved in dealing methamphetamine and other drugs. These crews have developed characteristics very similar to urban gangs (Finnegan, 1998; Shafer and Navarro, 2003; Shelden et al, 2004).

Unlike urban gangs skinhead crews are not neighborhood based. They have little practical need or motivation to control or protect a specific territory. Since there are relatively few skinheads in any given North American city, neighborhood based crews are unusual. Skinhead crews tend to draw from all

over a locality. Generally there is a crew, or a few crews of racist skinheads, some anti-racist skinheads, and maybe some traditional skinheads.

David Moore argues that one way in which skinheads do practice a form of territorial behavior is by trying to exert ownership over skinhead identity in the areas in which they operate. The Australian skinheads Moore studied felt justified in questioning, bullying, or attacking unknown skinheads or non-skinheads who were wearing articles of skinhead clothing. According to Moore the skinheads "exert power over one another, over who wears their visual style and who is accepted as having appropriate qualifications. . .Visual style is a symbol of group identity for skinheads; it signals 'our way'" (Moore, 1994: 57).

The skinheads in my study also engaged in this type of policing of the use of skinhead visual style. Encounters with unknown skinheads were often characterized by interrogation about the stranger's affiliations and knowledge of the skinhead subculture. The goal is to determine if the stranger is worthy of the skinhead identity they are presenting. The crew members displayed a high level of contempt for most anti-racist skinheads, and for what they referred to as "posers," individuals who dressed like skinheads but displayed little commitment to the values of the subculture. The following account describes a fairly typical encounter between crew members and an unknown skinhead:

> We ran into this kid, you know, boots and braces and all, downtown. So, one of the boys says "white power!" to him to see how he responds. So, he doesn't say nothing. So I go "Are you a Nazi? Are you down with [white] power?" We beat him up a bit. It would have been worse if he said he was down with us, we knew he wasn't.

In a few instances the crew members attacked unknown skinheads without preamble. In these cases the unknown skinheads were either displaying anti-racist symbols, or they were engaging in behaviors that the crew members found inappropriate or offensive. In either of these situations the stranger's adoption of the skinhead style is seen as a deviant act. In one such case two crew members came across an unknown youth dressed like a skinhead begging for change on a city street:

> We saw this kid panhandling, and he had this close-crop, he was wearing Docs and a bomber, just sitting on the sidewalk begging for money. We're like "Check out this loser, he thinks he's a skin." We go up to him and he asks us for change. I just gave him my boot in the side of his head, gave him a good kicking. We kicked his bag and stuff into the street. And we told him, "If we see you dressed like that again you're done."

In this case the skinheads identified their victim as engaging in inappropriate behavior for a skinhead. As one skinhead described it, "That's one thing you'll never see a true skinhead doing, you'll never see one panning. It's a matter of pride; right, not to be begging in the street." Because the stranger was begging on the street while dressed as a skinhead the crew members felt that he was presenting a negative image of skinheads.

Ongoing Group Conflicts. Ongoing conflicts with other skinheads were a common occurrence. Many of the crews had to contend with ideologically opposed factions of skinheads. Most anti-racist skinheads claim affiliation with SHARP, Skinheads against Racial Prejudice. SHARP however is more of a label than an actual organization. SHARP crews are locally organized and usually produce their own patches bearing the SHARP logo of a Trojan helmet. Claiming

membership in SHARP seems to be an established way of distancing oneself from racism while maintaining a skinhead identity. Some observers of the skinhead scene have noted that SHARP skinheads tend to be as violent as their racist counterparts (Christensen, 1994; Leet et al, 2000; Blee, 2002).

Anti-racist skinheads describe themselves as the real skinheads and claim that the racists, whom they often call "boneheads," are corrupting the skinhead subculture. The anti-racist skinhead role with regards to racist skinheads is summed up by the following statement from the website of the United Front Skinhead Organization, an anti-racist skinhead group:

> The United Front Skinhead Organization, however, promotes tolerance, multiculturalism and diversity - - even if its members have to break a few neo-Nazi skulls in the process (United Front, 2001).

The racists claim to have equally strong feelings about the SHARP skinheads:

> Well, the SHARPs and whatever, they aren't really skinheads. Real skinheads fight for their race.

On the surface the rivalry between the racist skinheads and the SHARP skinheads seems to hinge on the issue of racism, yet the participants are largely white males. Another way of conceiving the conflict is as a struggle over the ownership of skinhead identity with both sides proclaiming that they are the true skinheads and that those on the other side are just pretenders to the title. The anti-racist/racist issue is further complicated by the tendency of some skinheads to choose or switch sides for reasons that may have little to do with ideology (Christiansen, 1994; Kinsella, 1994; Blee, 2002).

The following account describes a conflict that took place as part of an ongoing conflict between a racist crew and a SHARP crew. Earlier the same evening the members of the racist crew had been physically confronted by the SHARP skinheads and had been on the losing end of the fight. Several hours later 5 racist crewmembers were cruising the streets around a SHARP member named Matt's home with the intention of getting revenge:

> We were all fired up after the fight, pissed off after what happened earlier, and we were all in the car driving around the streets near Matt's house. Well, we saw Matt coming down the street and pulled over. There was a little yap, then somebody shoved Matt, and he punched them in the nose, so we all jumped in. Dan was yelling, "I want him dead, I want this fucker dead!" Dan had grabbed him and was holding him down by his head and we were all giving him a kicking. Then this car pulls up and this couple starts yelling at us, so everybody scattered, except Dan because now Matt has him pinned by the arm and is telling him that the SHARPs are going to kill all of us. Later, you know, we realized that we were fucked because now the SHARPs were going to make sure we were gone for good. A bunch of the guys went to a white power Church in the boonies and stayed there for a while. The rest of us laid low. It was never the same after that, some guys moved away and others just weren't into it anymore.

While all of the crews were engaged in some level of ongoing conflict with anti-racist skinheads, most had also at some point been involved in ongoing conflicts with other crews of racist skinheads. These rivalries tended to grow out of conflicts between individual members of the respective crews. The following account describes the origin of an ongoing conflict between two racist crews. The incident occurred at a store that sold skinhead apparel and accessories that the local skinheads referred to as "the boot shop." Two skinheads from a racist crew were employed at the store, and at the time of this incident two additional members of the same crew were hanging out at the store:

> There was a big fight that happened at the boot shop. There was a bit of a conflict between the guys and [another racist crew] over that. There were these two guys. One guy got beaten real bad. They came in the boot shop, one of them had just gotten out of jail, and they wanted a pair of boots. And this guy tries on a pair, and then he was going to walk out of the store. You know, he said "I'll take these." And he got up and he was walking out of the store. There were four of us and we tried to stop him and it turned into a big fight and they got beat up really bad. The one guy got beat up; he got hit in the head with a two-by-four a couple of times. He was actually hospitalized for quite a while. And that sort of produced a lot of friction [between the crews] because these were like two old guys that had just gotten out of jail who went up there to get some boots. They went up there with the intention of just taking some boots, but they ended up getting beat pretty badly.

If the result of an individual conflict was to engender strong feelings of partisanship among the crew members on the respective sides, then a situation may develop where other crew members expand the conflict by taking it upon themselves to pursue the grievance when the opportunity presents itself. The conflict may further expand if the supporters of the aggrieved party assume that the associates of the original opponent are also acting as partisans and as such are legitimate targets for retaliation. This is what occurred as the result of the incident at the boot shop described above. In that case the status of the injured skinheads and also the severity of the injuries sustained were probably the most important factors for engendering partisan support among the members of their crew. The crew that the skinheads who worked at the boot shop belonged to saw the attempted theft of the boots as a deviant and unacceptable act and approved of the response. This partisan support by the crew members on each side served to escalate the original conflict into an ongoing rivalry between the crews.

Frequency of Violence

Violence was the most frequently used way of handling conflicts involving other skinheads. Violence was employed in 57% of the conflicts. Of the cases handled violently, 24% were reported to have resulted in no injury to the other party, 59% in minor injury and 18% in serious injury. No action was taken in 15% of the conflicts.

Third Party Behavior

In 92% of the conflicts with other skinheads, third parties were present at the time of the conflict. In 58% of these conflicts 4 or more third parties were present. These conflicts often took place in or in the vicinity of bars, clubs and other locales frequented by skinheads. The presence of a skinhead audience during many of these conflicts is notable because the presence of an audience is one factor that may play a role in the escalation of a conflict to violence.

In conflicts with other skinheads third parties typically had social ties to only one side in the conflict. In 49% of the cases involving third parties the majority of the individual third parties had exclusive social ties to one side or the other. In 25% of the conflicts the majority of individual third parties had social ties to both parties.

Social Ties and Third Party Behavior. When a third party only had ties to one principal party in a conflict they tended to act as partisans for that party. In 38% of conflicts between skinheads that involved third parties, the majority of individual third parties acted as partisans for one side or the other. Only the first principal party had third party partisan support in 33% of the conflicts, while 36%

of the cases involved partisans on both sides. In 15% of cases only supporters of the second party were present. In conflicts where the third parties were polarized around the principal parties, the majority of third parties acted as partisans. In 67% of conflicts third parties with exclusive ties to one side or the other acted as partisans in the conflict. In contrast, in cases where third parties had social ties to both principal parties, third party partisanship behavior was seen 14% of the time.

Status and Third Party Behavior. When all of the parties in a conflict were racist skinheads, the status of both principals and third parties in the racist skinhead subculture played a role in conflict outcomes. Conflicts between racist skinheads tended to be between individuals of similar status, largely defined by age and tenure in the subculture. When skinheads of different status levels did have conflicts, the status difference seemed to influence third party behavior. One particularly illustrative case involved "Mike" an 18 year old skinhead:

> Mike was drinking with three of his friends at a party. "Roy" a veteran skinhead in his twenties with a substantial reputation in the racist skinhead subculture was also at the party and had been drinking heavily. For reasons unknown to Mike, Roy, who only had a passing acquaintance with Mike, decided to insult Mike and question his skinhead credentials. Despite the provocation and the presence of three friends who had no social ties to Roy, Mike chose to tolerate the abuse. Mike explained that he didn't want to fight with Roy, and that he didn't think his friends would have been willing to support him against someone with Roy's status and reputation.

As the above cases illustrates, a status differential between the principal parties seemed to create a situation where third parties were unwilling to support the lower status side. In cases where the status of the principal parties was

equal, the status of partisan third parties could also influence the outcome of a conflict. Having a higher status partisan might embolden a crew member, while being confronted by one might make him rethink his course of action:

> There was another time I was going to go after this guy because he had been saying some things about me, and this older guy, he told me not to. He said, "No don't." Actually his exact words were, "he's under my wing." So there's definitely cases of, older guys who have taken a shine to the younger guy, looking out for him.

Conflicts with Members of Other Subcultures

Characteristics of Other Subcultures

In 20% of the out-group conflicts the other parties were not skinheads but were affiliated with another youth subculture. These subcultural types included punk rockers, rockabillies, skateboarders and metal-heads (devotees of heavy metal music). These groups generally came into contact due to a certain amount of crossover between their scenes in terms of both culture and spatial location. Although the skinheads occasionally came into conflict with members of more traditional urban gangs, these gangs were not considered to be a subculture in the same sense as they exist outside of this network of interrelated scenes.

Individuals affiliated with the punk subculture were most frequently involved in conflicts with skinheads. The skinheads seemed to express a particular distain for punk rockers, despite the fact that many of them had been affiliated with the punk subculture before they became skinheads. Punk rockers were often described as having undesirable traits such as poor hygiene or being physically weak:

I hate these little punk fuckers. Crusty punks they call them, the dirty ones with the anarchy patches.

Table 5.6: Relationship with Members of Other Subcultures (N=30)

Relationship	Percent	Frequency
Acquaintance	60%	18
Stranger	37%	11
Unknown Relationship	3%	1

Sources of Conflict

When conflicts were with members of other subcultures 53% were individual conflicts and 47% were group-centered conflicts. The most common type of personal conflict involved a crewmember responding to behavior he found disrespectful or offensive. This was the source of 63% of personal conflicts:

> We were at this all-ages show and I was leaning against this door that's, got a window in it. Well, this little fucking punker kid, little fucking prick, comes up to the other side of the window and starts making faces at me. He knows the door doesn't open, so he's right up against the glass making faces. So I punched him, right through the window. He got a face full of broken glass. I fucked up my hand pretty bad, too.

Group-centered conflicts often involved groups of punk rockers who identified themselves as leftists or anarchists:

> Chris and two other skinheads were walking home from a night out when they came across the guitar player on from a local punk band staggering home drunk. They pushed him to the ground and kicked him repeatedly. Chris explained that the band and their friends were "a bunch of commie fags" who the skinheads couldn't stand.

Frequency of Violence

Violence was the most frequently used way of handling conflicts involving members of other subcultures. Violence was employed in 73% of the conflicts.

Of the cases handled violently, 32% were reported to have resulted in no injury to the other party, 41% in minor injury and 27% in serious injury. While the majority of conflicts were handled violently, Inaction was used to handle 10% of the conflicts and avoidance was employed in 10% of cases.

Third Party Behavior

When conflicts were with members of other subcultures, third parties were present in 97% of the cases. In 57% of the cases 4 or more third parties were present at the time of the conflict. Conflicts with members of other subcultures evidenced a higher degree of third party polarization than conflicts between skinheads. In 87% of the conflicts where third parties were present, all the third parties only had social ties to one side or the other.

Social Ties and Third Party Behavior. In conflicts with members of other subcultures third parties tended to act as partisans:

> Alec and a group of skinhead friends were walking into a club when one of the skinheads noticed that someone had spit on Alec's back. They looked back and saw a group of obviously intoxicated punks laughing. The skinheads charged the punk rockers who scattered and ran. The skinheads managed to grab two of the punks and beat them up.

Partisan behavior involving a majority of third parties was seen in 67% of the conflicts involving third parties. In 55% of these partisan conflicts only the skinhead side had supporters. In 45% of conflicts both sides boasted partisans. When the third parties had polarized ties and skinhead third parties were present, the majority of skinheads acted as partisans in 80% of conflicts.

In the small minority of cases that did not involve polarized third parties (13%), the presence of cross-cutting ties between the third parties and the

principal parties produced lower levels of partisanship. In half of these conflicts the third parties did not become involved in the conflict. In the other half there was a mixture of peacemaking and partisanship behavior, how a particular third party acted in these latter situations was a function of their ties to the principals. Those third parties with ties to only one principal party generally acted as partisans, while those with ties to both principals acted as peacemakers. None of these cases involving third parties with cross-cutting ties were handled violently. This can be contrasted with the 85% of cases with polarized third party ties that were handled violently. These cases did not involve principal parties with close social ties, so the difference in outcome seems attributable to cross-cutting third party ties.

Conflicts with Other Outsiders

Characteristics of Other Outsiders

A number of the conflicts described by the skinheads did not involve minorities or subcultural rivalries. These conflicts involved a wide range of situations and relationships. The majority of these conflicts involved strangers.

Table 5.7: Relationship in Other Out-group Conflicts (N=42)

Relationship	Percent	Frequency
Stranger	71%	30
Acquaintance	10%	4
Family	7%	3
Other	12%	5

Sources of Conflict

When conflicts were with other outsiders they were most often individual conflicts. Individual conflicts accounted for 70% of such conflicts. Disrespectful behavior was the source of 75% of the personal conflicts:

> I was headed home one night with Mike and these two drunk guys start calling us names, like "you fucking freaks!" We were like, what's up with this. So I was like, "Fuck you too moron!" And the guy just keeps on like "fucking pussies!" So I picked up a trashcan and whacked him right in the fucking head, fucking overhead slam, BOOM! The guy goes straight fucking down. His friend is freaking out, we just took off. That guy was pretty fucked up though.

Frequency of Violence

Violence was the most frequently used way of handling conflicts involving other outsiders. Violence was employed in 64% of the conflicts. Of the cases handled violently, 22% were reported to have resulted in no injury to the other party, 30% (8 cases) in minor injury and 44% in serious injury. Inaction was used to handle 17% of the conflicts.

Third Party Behavior

Third parties were present in 86% of the conflicts with other outsiders. In 52% of cases 4 or more third parties were present. The third parties had exclusive social ties to one side or the other in 89% of the cases involving third parties.

Social Ties and Third Party Behavior. When third parties were involved in conflicts between skinheads and other outsiders they acted as partisans in 53% of cases. In 11% of these partisanship cases only the skinhead side had supporters. In 21% of cases only the second party side had partisan supporters. In 68% of the conflicts there were partisans on both sides:

> We were down at the bar, and there's these college kids in there, you know, slumming. Anyway this cute girl walks by our table and I'm like "nice ass baby." Anyway one of the guys tells me to fuck off. I'm like, "are you going to make me?" And it pretty much started with me and him, then the boys and the other college pricks got into it. Then the bartender told us he called the cops so we took off.

General Patterns of Violence

Violence was the method most frequently used for handling conflicts. Overall 63% of conflicts were handled violently. Violence was also the most frequent method used to handle conflicts across all the different categories of second parties. Table 5.8 shows the relative frequency of violent conflict handling for each of the categories of second parties.

Table 5.8: Conflict Handling by Principal Party Characteristics (N=158)

Characteristic	Violent Percent	Violent Frequency	Nonviolent Percent	Nonviolent Frequency	Total
Minority	62%	16	38%	10	26
Skinhead	57%	34	43%	26	60
Subculture	73%	22	27%	8	30
Other	64%	27	36%	15	42
Total	63%	99	37%	59	158

The relative frequencies show a small amount of variation between the categories. Conflicts with members of other subcultures were more likely to be handled violently while conflicts among skinheads were slightly less likely to be handled violently than other types of conflicts. A Chi-square test was used to examine whether the variation was large enough to suggest a statistically meaningful difference in the likelihood of violent conflict handling between the categories. The Chi-square test indicated that there was no meaningful association between membership in a given category and the conflict being handled violently.

Table 5.9: Conflict Handling by Principal Party Relationship (N=158)

Relationship	Violent Percent	Violent Frequency	Nonviolent Percent	Nonviolent Frequency	Total
Stranger	63%	46	36%	26	72
Acquaintance	56%	32	44%	25	57
Associate	67%	6	33%	3	9
Friend	57%	4	43%	3	7
Romantic Partner	100%	4	0%	0	4
Family	67%	2	33%	1	3
Unknown Relationship	83%	5	17%	1	6
Total	63%	99	37%	59	158

Table 5.9 shows the relative frequency of violent conflict handling for 7 categories of relationship between the principal parties in a conflict. The majority of cases, about 82%, fall into the first two categories, Stranger and Acquaintance. I ran statistical tests on three truncated versions of this table focusing on the most populous categories, the Stranger and Acquaintance categories, as well as a combined Friend and Associate category. This provided three levels of social distance between the principal parties with enough cases in each category to be able to use a Chi-square test to examine the relationship between the variables. I also ran two additional tests, one looking at only the Stranger and Acquaintance categories and one looking at only the Acquaintance and Friend/Associate categories. These tests involved calculating both a Chi-square statistic and odds ratios for the two models. The results in every case indicated no statistically significant association between the variables. The

results indicate that for this set of cases the relationship between the principal parties cannot function by itself as a predictor of the likely outcome of conflicts.

The above finding is one of the few instances where the information that the skinheads provided on how conflicts were generally handled did not match up with the results of the conflict analysis. The skinheads responded that friends were generally less likely to resolve their conflicts using violence. One possible explanation for the conflicting findings is that people may be more likely to report atypical cases involving friends, focusing on relatively rare violent incidents instead of common ways in which friends often resolve disputes.

One-on-One Conflicts

Violent conflicts with one principal party on each side and with no third parties involved were relatively rare, making up only 6% of the conflicts in the sample. This is notable in itself because one-on-one violence is characteristic of modern societies, accounting for a large majority of violent acts (Miethe and McCorkle, 2001; Cooney, 2003). The one-on-one conflicts had several characteristics that distinguished them from conflicts that involved third parties. The majority of violent one-on-one conflicts, 78%, involved individuals who were known to one another. In contrast, 80% of one-on-one conflicts with strangers were handled without violence. The majority of these conflicts, 89%, were individual conflicts involving a personal grievance.

One-on-one conflicts were also less likely to involve principals who had been consuming alcohol. Alcohol had been consumed by the crew member before 44% of the violent one-on-one conflicts, as opposed to 75% of all violent

conflicts. In one-on-one conflicts that were handled without violence alcohol consumption had occurred before 20% of the conflicts.

Violent Conflicts with Minorities

Violent conflicts with minorities accounted for 16% of the violent cases. Taken as a group, conflicts with minorities were no more likely to be handled violently than conflicts with non-minorities. About 62% of the conflicts with minorities were handled violently as opposed to 63% of the conflicts with heterosexual whites.

I used the fact that most minority conflicts involved strangers to create a comparative group. The comparative group contained cases that had the same basic structure as the minority cases but involved white heterosexuals. I used a Chi-square test to assess whether there was an association between the second party being a minority and the conflict being handled violently. There was no statistically significant association between the variables at a=0.1.

Conflicts with homosexuals were more likely to be handled violently than those with other groups. Among the conflicts with homosexuals, 83% of the cases were handled violently. In addition, violent conflicts with homosexuals resulted in serious injury in 60% of cases. This was considerably higher than the 27% of violent conflicts with visible minorities that resulted in serious injury.

Alcohol and Violence

A large proportion of the conflicts involved principal parties who had been consuming alcohol. In 21% of cases handled violently the crew member had been consuming alcohol before the conflict occurred. In an additional 54% of

violent cases both parties in the conflict had been consuming alcohol. Similar levels of alcohol consumption were seen in the non-violent conflicts. In 19% of conflicts that were not handled violently the crew member had been consuming alcohol, and in an additional 58% of such cases both principal parties had been consuming alcohol.

I used a Chi-square test to test for an association between alcohol consumption and violence and did not find a statistically significant association between those variables at a=0.05. I also used a Chi-square test to determine whether there was an association between alcohol consumption and conflicts with minorities. The association between these latter variables was not significant at a=0.05, but it was significant at a=0.1. The odds ratio for this relationship indicated that the odds of a conflict being with a minority were 2.2 times higher when there had been no consumption of alcohol by the crew member.

Third Parties and Violence

Third parties were present in 91% of the conflicts that were handled violently. However, third party involvement was prevalent with 91% of all conflicts and 92% of conflicts handled nonviolently occurring in the presence of third parties. In 73% of cases handled violently potential supporters of the crew member were present. In 30% of those cases, 3 or more such potential supporters were present. When conflicts were handled nonviolently potential supporters of the crew member were present in 68% of cases. In 27% of those cases, 3 or more potential supporters were present.

Third Party Social Ties and Violence. Black's theory of third parties argues that certain arrangements of social ties are more conducive to violent outcomes. The social ties between the principal parties and the third parties comprise the social structure of a conflict. Some conflict structures, such as those where third parties have cross-cutting ties to both parties, will promote settlement behaviors as concerned third parties try to help resolve the conflict. Conversely, conflicts where the third parties have discrete ties to one side in the conflict will be more likely to promote partisanship (Black and Baumgartner, 1983; Black, 1998). Recent research on the role of third parties in conflicts has provided support for Black's theoretical model (Cooney, 1998; Phillips and Cooney, 2005). Table 5.10 describes the relationship between the social structure of the conflict and the behavior of third parties.

Table 5.10: Social Ties and General Third Party Action (N=144)

	General Third Party Action				
Social Ties	Inaction	Majority Peacemakers	Mixed	Majority Partisans	Total
Cross-cutting	1 (11%)	4 (44%)	0	4 (44%)	9
Mixed	13 (48%)	4 (15%)	9 (33%)	1 (4%)	27
Discrete	13 (12%)	1 (1%)	19 (18%)	75 (69%)	108
Total	27	9	28	80	144

Third parties with social ties to both sides in a conflict were present in 25% of all conflicts that involved third parties. Third parties with cross-cutting ties were present at 35% of conflicts that were handled nonviolently. Such parties seemed less likely to be present during conflicts that were handled violently, where they were present in 19% of the cases.

In 75% of all cases involving third parties the third parties only had social ties to one side in the conflict. This configuration was more common in conflicts handled violently, where discrete ties were observed in 81% of cases, as opposed to 65% of cases handed nonviolently. When all of the third parties had exclusive social ties to one side or the other they were most likely to become involved in the conflict as partisans. In 69% of conflicts with discrete ties the majority of third parties acted as partisans. When all third parties had discrete ties to one of the principals in a conflict, the odds of the majority of third parties acting as partisans were 14 times higher than for all other conflict structures combined. This finding remained constant when controlling for the presence of potential supporters of the crew member. The association between conflict structure and third party action was statistically significant at a=0.05.

One seemingly anomalous finding is the small cluster of partisanship cases that occur when the majority of third parties have cross-cutting ties to both principal parties in a conflict. Third parties with social ties to both sides in a conflict would generally be expected to try and help resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner. However, this depends on the strength of the social ties to each side of the conflict being relatively equal. With conflicts involving a skinhead crew both the personal ties and the organizational ties between the parties must be considered. As all of these conflicts are with people outside the crew, any members of the crew present at a conflict will likely have stronger ties to their fellow crewmember as they are connected by both personal and organizational ties. A former skinhead offered the following description of how

crew members would usually act in a conflict between a crew member and a friend:

> If you screw with another crew member, I mean, no matter how much they like you, if you were to beat up another crew member, that's where their loyalty lies. If anything happens that they have to take sides, they'll always side with their own.

Third Party Actions and Violence. Majority partisanship was the most common third party behavior occurring in 56% of all third party cases. Black's theory of third parties argues that when the majority of third parties act as partisans the potential for a violent outcome increases (Black, 1998). Phillips and Cooney (2005) found that conflicts with high levels of third party partisanship were significantly more likely to be handled violently than conflicts where third parties took on other roles. Table 5.11 shows the relative frequencies of violent conflict handling for each of the categories of third party action.

Table 5.11: General Third Party Action and Conflict Handling (N=144)

	Conflict Handling		
General TP Action	Violent	Non-violent	Total
Inaction	15 (56%)	12 (44%)	27
Peacemakers	5 (56%)	4 (44%)	9
Mixed Action	12 (43%)	16 (57%)	28
Partisanship	58 (73%)	22 (28%)	80
Total	90	54	144

As Table 5.11 indicates, violence was most common when the majority of third parties acted as partisans. Cases handled violently in which the majority of third parties acted as partisans comprised 64% of all violent cases with third parties. Using a Chi-square test I confirmed that there was a statistically significant association between general third party action and conflict handling. This association was significant at a=0.05. To further examine the relationship

between partisanship and violence I used a modified version of Table 5.11 to calculate the odds ratio for the relationship between partisanship and violence. Cases where the general third party behavior was inaction, peacemaking or mixed behavior were collapsed into a single category. This created a dichotomous partisanship variable where one category was majority partisanship and the other was all other possible actions. When the majority of third parties acted as partisans the odds of a conflict being handled violently were 2.6 times higher than when the majority of third parties did not act as partisans. The odds of a conflict being handled violently were even higher when a conflict involved skinhead partisans. When skinheads acted as partisans for a crew member, the odds of conflicts being handled violently were 3.7 times higher than when a crew member did not have partisans. Both of these associations are statistically significant at a=0.05.

Third party partisanship also increased the likelihood of a conflict resulting in injury. When the majority of third parties in a conflict acted as partisans, the odds of a violent conflict resulting in injury were 2.6 times higher than in cases where the majority of third parties did not act as partisans. In cases where other skinheads acted as partisans for a member of their crew the likelihood of injury increased. When the first party had skinhead partisans the odds of a conflict resulting in injury were 2.9 times more likely than in conflicts were the majority of third parties did not act as partisans. Both of these relationships were statistically significant at a=0.05.

Of the cases that were handled violently there were 15 where the third parties did not intervene in the conflict. In 73% of these cases the principal parties knew one another. Eighty percent of these cases involved individual grievances.

In conflicts where the principals are friends, third parties may let them work their problems out themselves, but in conflicts where the third parties have discrete ties the causes of inaction are less apparent. Such behavior might be considered deviant inaction (Phillips and Cooney, 2005). The labeling of and negative response to deviant inaction among skinheads has been noted in previous research (Moore, 1994; Smith, 2000). However, if the third parties do not believe a grievance is legitimate they may choose to stay out of the conflict. Higher status skinheads may also choose to abstain from involvement in a conflict involving skinheads of lower status. In some cases a conflict may be ended swiftly and decisively negating the need for third party involvement. This is the case in the following account. The story starts with four members of a crew drinking together in an apartment:

> We were at Pete's place. We were sitting around drinking and these two skinheads showed up, but I didn't know them. Pete knew them though. They came in and they were sitting around and one of these guys started just lipping off, being a loudmouth and, you know, being a tough guy. At one point Pete went to his bedroom and he came out with one of those small baseball bats, and he just walked over and cracked the guy in the head. That was it. He walked over and smacked the guy in the head. He walked back in his room, put the bat down, just came back out and picked up his beer. The guy sat there for a couple of minutes just kind of fucked up. Then he got up and left with his friend. That was it.

The conflict in Pete's apartment was handled very quickly without the help of partisans. But the story also illustrates circumstances under which partisanship can be a less than appealing option. Consider the second party skinhead's friend. He is put in a very awkward position. He could take over the conflict on behalf of his injured friend, but if he pursues the conflict he will likely have to take on four crew members. Inaction is really his only option. It is also possible that he did not approve of his friend's behavior either and recognized Pete's response as justified.

This conflict also illustrates how third parties can influence conflicts by their presence alone. Although Pete is the only one who actually engages in the violent act, three fellow crewmembers are present. Pete's actions are taken with the expectation that these three will act as partisans if the need arises, serving to limit the potential negative consequences of Pete's action.

Conventionality and Respectability of Second Parties

One interesting aspect of the skinheads' violent behavior was the seeming lack of consequences for their actions. Other crewmembers were unlikely to complain to the police about violent behavior, but what about outsiders? It seemed as if the majority of people who were involved in violent incidents with skinheads were either unlikely to go to the police, or unlikely to be taken seriously if they did.

The concepts of conventionality and respectability may help to explain this situation. If the other parties in a conflict have low levels of conventionality and/or respectability it can decrease the likelihood of reporting an assault to the

police. It may also reduce the likelihood the police would take the case seriously if it was reported (Black, 1976).

One skinhead laughingly recounted a situation in which a punk rocker had been beaten up by skinheads and tried to report it to the police. The police responded by arresting the victim for public intoxication and placing him in a holding cell overnight. This story suggests that certain types of people are less likely to get assistance from the police. Factors such as appearance, alcohol consumption, and the time at which the incident occurred, may all play a role in the relative likelihood of police action by serving to define the conventionality level of the victim. Punk rockers are members of an unconventional subculture and adopt dress and hairstyles that visually distinguish them from the more conventional members of society. Being out late at night and intoxicated are also likely to be viewed as unconventional behavior.

People who lack respectability or who fear that their reputation will be damaged are unlikely to report victimization. When the skinheads targeted homosexuals it was often in locations known as pickup spots for anonymous sexual activity. It was not lost on the skinheads that it was very unlikely these victims would go to the police for fear of damaging their reputations.

Those who dislike and/or distrust the police are also unlikely to go to them for help. Skinheads and punks tend to fall into this category. Among skinheads especially going to the police would be seen as an inappropriate response to an attack. If a victim has allies they may instead engage in a retaliatory attack which would be likely to lead to an ongoing conflict between the groups.

Because of the type of people with whom skinheads are involved in violent conflicts, their actions are less frequently subject to law. It would probably be incorrect to conclude that skinheads consistently choose their victims based on their low levels of conventionality and/or respectability. Rather it seems to be a function of the types of people with whom skinheads interact that many of them fall into these categories.

Alternative Conflict Outcomes

Inaction

In some cases the crew members did not act to redress their grievances. This was the case in 12% of the conflicts. Conflicts with acquaintances accounted for 53% of the cases of inaction and conflicts with strangers accounted for 37%. Sixty-one percent of inaction cases involved third parties with discrete ties. Some inaction involved an imbalance of power weighing against the crew member. In 44% of cases the crew member and any potential supporters were outnumbered. This can be contrasted with conflicts handled violently where crewmembers and their supporters were outnumbered in 21% of cases. In 45% of the cases with discrete third party ties, the crew member was alone while the other party had supporters. In some other cases the other party had higher status skinheads as partisans.

Avoidance

Some conflicts were handled by avoiding or escaping the other party. This was the case in 9% of the conflicts. The majority, 67%, of the conflicts handled with avoidance involved strangers. The rest involved acquaintances.

The majority of cases, 60%, involved third parties with discrete ties. Like inaction cases, avoidance cases were more likely to involve a larger opposing group. In 58% of the conflicts involving third parties the crewmember and potential supporters were outnumbered.

Non-Violent Retaliation

In some of the conflicts non-violent forms of retaliation were employed by the crew members in order to redress a grievance. Forms of non-violent retaliation have been observed in a wide range of settings from suburban neighborhoods to corporate offices (Baumgartner, 1988; Morrill, 1995; Tucker, 1999). Non-violent retaliation is often covert, especially when it is directed towards a status superior (Baumgartner, 1984). Among the skinheads non-violent retaliation was largely seen between peers, and while such acts may have initially been carried out with certain amount of discretion, the details rarely remained secret.

Most cases of non-violent retaliation occurred in personal conflicts where third parties had cross-cutting ties to both parties. These conflicts also tended to involve less serious, often petty, grievances that were unlikely to be viewed by others as legitimate. Third party support for violence in these cases tended to be low, so skinheads who were unwilling to tolerate or avoid a source of grievance found other ways to retaliate:

> Ryan was at a party with several members of his crew. During the evening his ex-girlfriend showed up with her new boyfriend. Despite the fact they had broken up several months before Ryan was angry and jealous. Complicating matters was the fact that the new boyfriend was a popular skinhead who was friendly with members of Ryan's crew. Ryan knew that starting a fight with the new boyfriend was likely to be viewed by

> others as petty jealousy, and might even harm his reputation. Instead Ryan stole the new boyfriend's bomber jacket and scarf and he and two close friends took the jacket outside and all three urinated on it. They then left the jacket and scarf to freeze in the cold winter air.

In a few cases non-violent retaliation was used as a direct proxy for violence. This occurred when the individuals the skinheads had a grievance against were not accessible but their property was. In one case two skinheads were verbally harassed by a group of young people in a car. When the skinheads later came across a parked car that they believed was the same vehicle, they proceeded to scratch offensive messages into the paint with a knife and a set of keys.

Second Party Violence

While a skinhead could make a decision to handle a conflict violently or in another way, the second parties in the conflicts did not always cooperate. In some instances the skinheads chose to handle conflicts violently and found themselves outmatched. In one incident four intoxicated skinheads attacked two African-American males after a short exchange of threats. The fight went very badly for the skinheads and two had to be treated for serious stab wounds. In other cases skinheads made a decision to handle a conflict non-violently, but the other party in the conflict didn't come to the same decision. In one case three skinheads verbally harassed an older African-American male who was walking on the other side of the street telling him to "go back to the ghetto." The man kept walking and the skinheads, who had no intention of taking the matter any further, turned their attention to something else. At that point the older man

picked up a chunk of rock and threw it at the skinheads hitting one in the head and drawing blood.

Discussion

The analysis of out-group conflicts did not provide support for the conception that typical skinhead violence is characterized by brutal unprovoked attacks on minorities and homosexuals. While the crewmembers did engage in violence involving minorities and homosexuals, this type of violence accounted for only 16% of all violent incidents reported. The other 84% of violent incidents involved a wide range of second parties including but not limited to other skinheads, punk rockers and college students. Most of this latter violence did not seem to have the character of the ideologically motivated "terrorist" violence that Hamm described in *American Skinheads*.

While violence involving members of minority groups made up a relatively small percentage of cases in my sample, it is possible that limited contact with minorities may play a role in the frequency of such conflicts. Baron (1997) suggested that a lack of contact with minority groups may have limited the amount of interracial violence the skinheads he studied engaged in. However, the skinheads in Baron's sample were frequently in contact with members of one minority group, native Canadians, but rarely engaged in violence with members of that group. Baron speculated that such conflicts were avoided because the risks of retaliation were too great. Baron's study suggests that there may be several reasons for a lack of conflict between skinheads and minorities including a lack of regular contact with members of minority groups and a desire to avoid

contact with groups that are able to effectively retaliate. This latter suggestion might explain why conflicts between skinheads and Black or Hispanic gangs seem to be quite rare.

Like the skinheads studied by Baron, the skinheads in my sample rarely sought out conflicts with racial or ethnic minorities or homosexuals. The few cases in which they went out looking for victims involved homosexuals, and seemed to hinge on either economic gain or thrill-seeking behavior in which the principal motivation seemed to be having fun at someone else's expense. This finding is in line with research that suggests that "mission" hate crimes where individuals are targeted specifically for ideological reasons are much less common than "thrill-seeking" hate crimes where the perpetrators commit their actions in a quest for excitement and entertainment (Levin and McDevitt, 1993).

If the violence of the racist skinheads was ideologically motivated I would expect to see more mission oriented violence, or at least more effort put into finding minority victims. The skinheads in my sample did not report engaging in any conflicts that involved them going out to find victims who were members of racial or ethnic minorities. Conflicts that the skinheads did have with members of racial or ethnic minorities were the product of chance encounters.

Most of the violent incidents reported occurred spontaneously. Preplanned acts of violence were very rare. There were a few cases involving homosexuals where the victims were intentionally sought out, but these were relatively unusual events. Even the conflicts involving racial or ethnic minorities tended to arise spontaneously. The second parties in the conflicts were most

often people who the skinheads encountered in the course of their usual activities, in bars and clubs, and on the street.

The tendency for the skinheads to come into conflict with people whom they encountered in the course of their normal activities is illustrated by the nature of the second parties in the conflicts. More than half of all second parties had an identifiable subcultural affiliation, and in 38% of all out-group conflicts the second party was a skinhead outside the crew. Skinheads and members of other subcultures such as punk rockers often move in interrelated scenes and often come into contact with each other increasing the potential for conflict. In addition, many of the violent incidents involving strangers involved other groups of young males often identified by the skinheads as "jocks" or "college kids". These young males were often encountered at night in bars or on the street.

Group Conflicts

The majority of conflicts with minorities, about one-half of the conflicts with members of other subcultures and about one-third of the conflicts with the other categories of outsiders were group centered conflicts. Where personal conflicts were usually a response to a specific grievance, group conflicts involved people the skinheads defined as enemies. These could be ideologically defined enemies as in the case of racial or ethic minorities, homosexuals, or SHARP skinheads, or they could be other groups the skinheads were feuding with. While the causes of these latter rivalries were often clear, some ongoing conflicts were an inherent part of the subculture.

When a person becomes a racist skinhead they are entering into a world in which many rivalries are already established. Examples are rivalries with anti-racist SHARP skinheads or punk rockers. It is possible is that opposition towards particular groups is part of what attracts a skinhead to a racist crew, although I found only limited evidence in support of this. A number of the racist skinheads were part of a SHARP crew at one point, at which time crews of racist skinheads would be their rivals. As far as punk rockers are concerned, the majority of the skinheads in the sample were involved in the punk scene before they became skinheads, so it seems unlikely that a hatred of punks played a major role in their involvement in the skinhead subculture. Rather than being a reflection of the collective biases of the individual crew members, many crew rivalries seemed to be a product of crewmembers conforming to a set of social orientations that they accepted when joining a crew. Similar behavior can be seen in many types of gangs. When a person joins a gang that is affiliated with the Crips they automatically enter into a rivalry with members of gangs affiliated with the Bloods (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Similarly, a new member of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club automatically becomes a rival of members of the Outlaws motorcycle club (Wolf, 1991). These orientations do not require a preexisting personal animosity towards the rival group. They are historical constructs, understood by participants as part of the subcultural world which they inhabit. In many cases current participants in these rivalries may not even be aware of the origins of such conflicts.

Third Parties

The majority of out-group conflicts were characterized by the presence of third parties with social ties to only one side in a conflict. In these cases the third parties tended to act as partisans for the party with whom they were affiliated. The presence of third parties with discrete social ties increased the likelihood that violence would be used to handle a conflict.

The relationship between the presence of third parties with discrete social ties, partisanship behavior, and violent conflict handling is extremely important for understanding skinhead violence. Mark Cooney (2003) has argued that violent behavior in developed societies has largely become the domain of individual actors. The large majority of violent acts involve one aggressor and one victim. Cooney argues that this represents a shift from the past in which violence tended to be a collective behavior. Cooney identifies the weakening of social ties and corresponding obligations as leading to a reduction in partisanship, and thus a reduction in collective violence.

Among skinheads partisanship is a common response to a conflict. Crewmembers are expected to aid their fellow crewmembers when situations become violent. Those who make a habit of abandoning their fellow crewmembers without good reason are likely to be kicked out of the crew. In a very real sense, membership in a crew is dependent on one's willingness to provide partisan support for other members of the crew.

The members of skinhead crews have the characteristics that have been identified as promoting collective violence (Senechal de la Roche, 1996; 2001; Cooney, 2003). They are tied together by virtue of their close relational ties, their

membership in the crew and their involvement in the skinhead subculture. As discussed in Chapter 4, the crewmembers adopt a visual identity and an ideological position that clearly distinguish them from most other people. Even within the skinhead subculture, an allegiance to a specific crew distinguishes the crew members from all other skinheads. This combination of relational, organizational and cultural ties promotes solidarity among the members of a crew.

Cooney (2003) suggests that these conditions will promote both collective violence and violence against non-intimate others. These predictions are supported by the cases of skinhead violence which both involved third party partisanship in the majority of violent cases, and involved a large percentage of non-intimate second parties. This latter point is clearly illustrated by the fact that 46% of the second parties in violent conflicts were strangers to the skinheads.

Alcohol

Mark Hamm's "Beer, Bonding and Berserking" theory of identifies the consumption of alcohol as a central factor for explaining skinhead violence. According to Hamm, the consumption of alcohol, especially beer, mixed with exposure to the racist propaganda of adult hate groups, is an important precursor to violent behavior (Hamm, 1993). The fact that skinheads were consuming alcohol in 75% of the violent cases in my sample might initially seem to offer support for Hamm's argument. However, alcohol had also been consumed in virtually the same percentage of the non-violent conflicts. Statistically speaking

there was no significant association found between first party alcohol consumption and violent conflict handling.

Across all of the conflicts I found a statistically significant association between the number of skinheads present at the time of a conflict and the consumption of alcohol. This provides support for the findings of other researchers that drinking alcohol, and especially beer, is a central element of skinhead socialization (Blazak, 1995; Baron, 1997; Smith, 2000). Young and Craig (1997) found that the skinheads in their sample didn't bother to get together unless sufficient funds were available for purchasing alcohol. The omnipresence of alcohol consumption in the skinhead subculture makes any argument linking alcohol consumption to violence, or any other behavior, problematic.

Hamm theorized a causal link between alcohol consumption and skinhead violence. "The temporal order of beer use and terrorism does suggest a causal role for intoxicants" (Hamm, 1993: 195). The behavior of the skinheads in my sample did not offer support for this model. In addition to the lack of a statistically significant relationship between alcohol consumption and violence, conflicts with minorities were more likely to occur when the skinheads had not been drinking. In addition, some skinheads victimized homosexuals with the motive of robbing them to gain funds to purchase alcohol, behavior that clearly doesn't fit with Hamm's model.

Conclusion

Out-group violence was largely collective violence. It was characterized by a lack of social ties between the principal parties involved in conflicts and by the involvement of third parties with discreet social ties to one of the principal parties. These third parties frequently acted as partisans and their involvement in conflicts promoted the use of violence.

The partisanship displayed by skinhead third parties can be attributed to the solidarity of the crews. This solidarity is a product of both the relational and cultural ties between crew members. The adoption of an unconventional appearance and a stigmatized ideology creates a large amount of social distance between the racist skinheads and most other groups in society. As a result the factors that reduce the likelihood of violence, such as cross-cutting individual and third party ties, are relatively uncommon.

In the next chapter I will examine conflicts between crew members. These conflicts have a very different character because both the principals and the majority of third parties have cross-cutting social ties. Because of these differences one would expect to see less violence and more use of non-violent forms of conflict management.

CHAPTER 6

IN-GROUP CONFLICT

Much of the literature on skinheads has focused on their conflicts with outsiders, especially members of minority groups. However, some recent research suggests that there is also a significant amount of internal conflict among the members of crews as well as conflict between rival groups of racist skinheads (Smith, 2000; Blee, 2002). The lack of attention paid to these latter types of conflict is problematic because an understanding of the way the skinheads interact among themselves is an important step towards understanding how they act towards others. Examining the management of conflict within skinhead crews provides insight into how individual characteristics and the values of the subculture are related to more clearly observable factors such as status, integration, third party behavior, and functional independence to create some of the distinctive dynamics of the skinhead crews.

The respondents described conflicts between crew members as being a frequent occurrence in all five crews. This is not surprising given that all the crew members reported that other members of the crew comprised their main social circle. A grievance between crew members was usually common knowledge within the crew, so conflicts within the crew tended to have a built in audience. The rest of the crew would generally know about a conflict and be aware of how it was resolved. The sources of conflict that interviewees reported as being

typical varied somewhat from crew to crew, but were generally fairly mundane in nature.

Sources of Conflict

> There's always internal soap operas going on all over the place. This guy doesn't like that guy; this guy's fucked that guy's girlfriend or whatever.

The above quote illustrates the generally mundane nature of conflicts within the skinhead crews. Many of the typical reasons for conflicts did not seem to be specific to skinheads. Many of the reasons given for fights between group members were similar to things that might cause a dispute or fight within any group of young males. As one skinhead succinctly put it:

> It could be almost anything with these guys.

Table 6.1: Sources of In-group Conflict

Disrespectful Behavior	25% [13 cases]
Physical Abuse or Attack	19% [10 cases]
Damage or Theft of Property	11% [6 cases]
Unskinheadlike Conduct	9% [5 cases]
Misplaced Behavior	9% [5 cases]
Called-out	8% [4 cases]
Jealousy	6% [3 cases]
Unclear or Unknown Source	13% [7 cases]

Individual Sources of Conflict

Many of the conflicts within the crew were personal conflicts between members. There were a number of sources of individual conflict in the crews.

Disrespectful Behavior. The most common source of individual conflict in the crews was behavior that was seen as a display of disrespect for the skinhead whom it was directed toward. Disrespectful behavior was defined as behavior that was deemed to be demeaning or offensive:

> Guys just didn't like being belittled, you know, made to look weaker than somebody else.

Another form of disrespectful behavior involved betrayals of trust. For example if a fellow crew member slept with a skinhead's wife or girlfriend it would generally be considered a personal matter between the two skinheads involved. This was interesting given the fact that such an act displays a disregard for the supposed brotherhood between the members of the crew. Disrespectful behavior was identified as the source of 25% of the in-group conflicts.

Physical Abuse, Attack, or Injury. Another relatively common source of conflict in the group was physical abuse or attack by a fellow crew member. If such an attack was seen as unprovoked it was likely to incite a conflict between the people involved. These types of cases could involve bullying, the escalation of friendly roughhousing to the point of conflict, or in one case a violent physical attack by a fellow crew member who was in the mist of a drunken "black-out." Nineteen percent of the in-group conflicts involved physical abuse, attack or injury.

Damage or Theft of Property. If a skinhead damaged or stole the property of another crew member a conflict was likely to arise. This was the case in 11% of the in-group conflicts. Of the 6 conflicts that fell in this category, 4 involved some type of theft and 2 solely involved damage to property. The stolen items that created conflicts ranged from a slice of pizza to a large amount of money. It is interesting that the skinheads viewed theft as a personal issue to be resolved between the members involved. Many other groups define theft within the group as a collective problem. Outlaw motorcycle clubs such as the Hell's Angels and the Pagans include a prohibition against stealing anything from other members in their club charters (Wolf, 1991).

Being Called-out. Skinheads were occasionally called-out by other members of the crew. These instances involved accusations of wrongdoing. If a skinhead felt that the accusations were untrue they often retaliated against the accuser in some manner. Eight percent of in-group conflicts involved a skinhead being called-out by another crew member.

Jealousy. Conflicts involving jealousy arose when a skinhead was upset by a relationship between another crew member and a female. Usually the aggrieved skinhead had had a previous relationship with the female in question. These cases were distinguished from those involving a current wife or girlfriend because cases involving a wife or girlfriend were likely to be viewed by the crew as legitimate grievances, where conflicts involving jealousy were more likely to be viewed as "sour grapes." Six percent of in-group conflicts were motivated by jealously.

These sources of conflict really have little to do with the norms or values of the skinhead subculture, or the organization of the skinhead crews. Instead they represent individual conflicts in which one person is aggrieved by the actions of another. These types of conflicts are found in many social contexts. In contrast the following types of conflicts revolved around behavioral expectations based on involvement in the racist skinhead subculture and in a particular crew.

Crew-centered Conflicts

Unskinheadlike Conduct. Some conflicts involved the violation of the collective norms of behavior shared by members of the crew. These types of transgressions represented a less common source of conflict than the individual-centered conflicts discussed previously. These conflicts occurred when a skinhead did something they shouldn't have done, or failed to do what was expected of them. The following quotes exemplify this type of conflict:

> Doing something you shouldn't be doing.
>
> If you ever say that you're not part of the group when you are, use that as an excuse, that's just not good.
>
> Not holding up your end in a fight.
>
> Shooting up junk, or sleeping with hookers, something dirty [that] skins don't do.

Conflicts involving the violation of group norms could develop in two ways. The group as a whole could react to the transgression, or a single individual might pursue the conflict as a self-appointed representative of the group. These latter cases differ from the individual conflicts in that the grievance is not personal

in nature. The transgression is seen as being against the crew, or the values of the skinhead subculture.

The reaction to the violation of accepted group norms depended on which norms were being violated. The lack of many concrete rules governing the behavior of crew members made defining norm violations somewhat tricky, and in many cases there was disagreement over whether norms had been violated. In fact, there seemed to be a variety of opinions about what the norms for skinhead behavior actually were. A similar lack of consensus was identified by Moore (1994) in his study of Australian skinheads. However, when any of the few mutually agreed on rules was violated a collective response by the crew was the likely outcome. When I asked my interview subjects about the most serious transgression a crew member could make, the answer was unanimous:

> If they think you've been talking to Mr. Policeman, you better watch your fucking balls.
>
> You don't call the cops. That would be bad.
>
> Being a rat.
>
> Anything to do with the police.

Talking to the police about group activities was described as the ultimate transgression a crew member could make and the one most likely to elicit a serious collective response from the other group members. Other types of gangs share the skinheads' prohibition on talking to the police about other gang members. Among the inner-city gang members studied by Decker and Van Winkle (1996), "snaking," or turning a fellow gang member in to the police was

one of the five most serious offenses a gang member could commit. Among the outlaw motorcycle club members studied by Wolf (1991), informing on a brother club member was grounds for expulsion from the club. It should be noted that for all the negative emphasis the skinheads put on this behavior, it seemed to be a rare occurrence.

Misplaced Behavior. Some behaviors that were generally considered acceptable might become a source of conflict if they were displayed in inappropriate contexts, or engaged in too frequently. For example, despite the emphasis on drinking in the crews, a skinhead whose drinking became problematic might be sanctioned by other crew members. One night when I was doing observation at a bar where skinheads congregated, I asked a skinhead about the whereabouts of one of his fellow crew members. He responded that they had arranged to pick the skinhead I had asked about up on the way to the bar, but when they reached his apartment some 45 minutes later he was so intoxicated that he couldn't talk coherently and could barely stand. The other skinheads decided to leave him behind because in that state they considered him a liability. Apparently this pattern of behavior was becoming increasingly common and a source of frustration to the members of the crew. I later heard that the skinhead in question was no longer considered to be an active member of the crew. After one too many similar episodes the other crew members simply stopped calling him when they were getting together.

Among the actual cases of conflict, individual conflicts were more frequent than group conflicts. Of the 46 cases of in-group conflict where the source of the

conflict was known 78% involved individual conflicts and 22% involved crew-centered issues. It should also be noted that many of the in-group conflicts were spontaneous in nature, erupting between people who had been on good terms prior to the conflict.

Moralistic Nature of In-group Conflicts

The majority of the conflicts in the crew seemed to be moralistic in nature. That is to say, that one party felt as if they had been unjustly treated by the other party in the conflict. The first party's behavior served as a way to redress the injustice:

If anybody screws with them they're going to do something about it.

Handling In-Group Conflicts

Whenever a skinhead has a grievance with another crew member he has to decide how to handle the conflict. The available choices range from doing nothing (inaction), to a variety of ways of actively attempting to redress the grievance. While the type of conflict handling employed might seem to be an entirely personal decision, the culture and structure of any given organization is likely to shape the types of conflict handling that are most often employed (Black, 1984, 1998; Morrill, 1989, 1992, 1995; Tucker, 1989, 1993, 1999; Baumgartner, 1992).

Predominating Techniques for Dispute Handling - Among the crewmembers the single most common way of handling conflicts was violence. Forty-three percent of the in-group conflicts were handled violently. In one instance a skinhead savagely beat another crewmember who he suspected of

sleeping with his girlfriend. In another case, an older skinhead pinned a younger skinhead on the floor and burned his scalp with a cigarette lighter after the younger skinhead made a disrespectful comment.

The next most frequently used way of handling conflicts was avoidance. Avoidance may involve leaving the scene of a conflict or purposefully avoiding the other parties involved in a conflict. Twenty-three percent of the in-group conflicts were handled with avoidance. Avoidance could be temporary or permanent. A case of temporary avoidance involved a skinhead who stopped hanging out with the crew for a period of time after another crewmember started dating his ex-girlfriend. A case of permanent avoidance involved all the members of skinhead crew who cut ties with a member after he was accused of stealing from other crew members.

Uncommon Methods of Conflict Handling – In many types of groups aggrieved individuals will appeal to authority figures to help them resolve conflicts. None of the cases in my sample involved a skinhead appealing to higher status crew members or authority figures outside the group in an effort to redress a grievance. Relatively rare forms of conflict handling used in the group were inaction and negotiation. Inaction, or choosing not to actively pursue a grievance, was used in 13% of the in-group conflicts. In most cases inaction involved younger skinheads putting up with the behavior of older skinheads. Negotiation, the resolving of a conflict through mutual discussion and compromise or apology was also relatively rare, only being seen in 11% of the conflicts. In one such case one crewmember's girlfriend claimed that another

crewmember had been hitting on her. The boyfriend was angry and wanted to fight the other skinhead. The accused skinhead went to the boyfriend and explained that the girl had actually hit on him and that she was "trouble." The boyfriend decided to accept his crewmember's version of events, averting a potentially violent outcome.

Violent In-group Conflict

Violence was the most commonly mentioned form of conflict handling among crew members occurring in 43% of all in-group conflicts. One of the original assumptions that I had going into this project was that skinheads by and large directed their aggression at outsiders and that there was relatively little violence within the crews. This proved incorrect. All of the respondents reported that during the time they had been in a skinhead crew there had been violent conflicts between members of their crew:

> Skins fight among themselves, for sure.
>
> If somebody had a beef with somebody else they'd generally settle it with a fight.
>
> They're always fighting each other.
>
> Always fights, always fighting.

Further, all reported that violence was considered an appropriate way to resolve a dispute, and that handling disputes in this manner garnered a skinhead a reputation both within the crew, and in the skinhead scene more generally. In contrast, a skinhead who failed to stand up for himself was likely to be widely disparaged. This distinguishes the skinheads from more socially respectable

organizations among whom serious disputes are often handled by appealing to authority figures for help.

Characteristics of In-group Violence

Violence in the skinhead crews was something that mainly occurred between those of relatively equal status in the group. Lateral, or peer, violence comprised 87% of the violent in-group cases. Of the remaining three cases, two involved violence that was directed downward in the group hierarchy, and the last involved violence directed upward towards higher status crew members.

The majority of the violence within the skinhead crews was the product of conflicts between individuals. Eighty seven percent of the conflicts that were handled violently were conflicts between individual crew members. Of the remaining three conflicts, two involved individuals who had a conflict with their crew and one in which a crew had a collective grievance against one of its members.

In the 19 violent cases where the cause of the conflict was known 84% of the cases involved personal grievances. That is to say that the aggrieved skinhead felt that the offense was directed at him personally. In 47% of these personal-grievance cases, the source of the conflict was some form of disrespectful behavior. In 21% of the violent cases, the source of the conflict was physical abuse or attack.

Most of the time violent conflicts in the crews did not result in serious injuries. In 78% of cases, conflicts that escalated to violence ended with either no injuries or only minor injuries that were considered to be of little consequence.

In the remaining 22% of cases, the injuries were more serious requiring some form of medical attention. The percentage of cases that resulted in serious injury is quite high compared to estimates that suggest that only 7% of all assault victims need to be treated at a hospital (Levin and McDevitt, 2002: 17). It also seems high considering that there are mediating factors present such as the relatively close social ties between group members. However, it must also be noted that many of the skinheads were experienced street-fighters and capable of inflicting serious damage to an opponent:

> It was mostly, you didn't really see weapons. You got into fist fights.

While most of the skinheads carried weapons, these were not usually employed in fights between crew members. To use a weapon in a fight with a member of one's own crew was considered to be highly inappropriate behavior. This served to limit the extent of injury in internal fights. At the same time, one wonders whether this increased the willingness of the crew members to fight one another since they knew the fights were unlikely to escalate past a certain point.

Drawing on the above factors, a typical violent conflict between crew members is a conflict between individual members of relatively equal status. The source of the conflict is a personal offense, and the conflict is unlikely to result in a serious injury to either of the involved parties. All four of these characteristics were present in 48% of the violent in-group conflicts:

> [A crewmember], he's kinda a dick sometimes. Anyway, this one time he started going on about my [14 year old] sister, how she's really cute and what he'd like to do to her. He was trying to wind me up, and it worked. I just laid into him and was just pounding him. He was on the ground just

trying to cover up and two of the other guys pulled me off. I wasn't gonna stop.

I was fighting with [my girlfriend] just like, arguing. Both of us were pretty pissed off, she was being a total bitch. Dave [another crewmember] was there and he tried to get me to back off, like "chill out." I just got really pissed off at him, like he was taking her side. . . I grabbed him and gave him a couple of good shots, and he was like, "what's your fucking problem."

[A fellow crewmember] . . . told some of the guys that I was using [cocaine], and I was buying the shit from niggers. He was just pissed because he used to go out with my girlfriend. So he was pissed at me and made this shit up, and was telling all these people. So I found out and when I saw him, I just beat him down.

Alcohol and Violence

Several skinheads suggested that the heavy consumption of alcohol that tended to accompany skinhead social gatherings as a contributing factor to the amount of violence:

There's always a fight. Sitting around drinking on a Friday or Saturday night, there's always going to be a fight.

When the people started drinking it became a little vicious. But I was a rough kid back then and I used to fight with the younger guys.

In the 22 violent conflicts for which there is information on alcohol consumption, alcohol was being consumed by the aggrieved skinhead in 77% of the cases, and by all principal parties in the conflict in 73% of the cases. This can be compared to the frequency of alcohol consumption in the 30 conflicts handled without violence where the principal parties had been consuming alcohol

in 53% of cases. These results suggest that conflicts in which the involved parties had consumed alcohol were more likely to be handled violently.

Escalation

> [Violence] was always gonna be the end result. [But] it might be resolved before it reached that point.

In any dispute between crew members the potential for violence was present. While in some cases violence occurred without prior warning, usually there was a period of escalation. During this period a skinhead would air a grievance against another skinhead, and the reaction of the second skinhead would determine how things would proceed:

> It would reach the point of violence when neither guy is going to back down, you'd see a fight.

> It would always start out with a verbal thing, like any fight I guess. The threat of physical violence was always there, you know, "if you don't stop doing what you're doing I'm going to punch you in the face." And if you've got a guy sitting there saying, "You're not going to punch me in the head, I'm going to punch you in the head," so there's gonna be a fight. If you got a guy sitting there going "I don't want him to punch me in the head, it's gonna hurt," he might stop. It would all depend on the people. If you got a guy that just doesn't want to fight, he might say "oh, okay, I'll stop doing that."

The fact that many conflicts between crew members did escalate to violence suggests that there were factors that worked against the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In some cases the conflicts might be over things that could not be undone, sleeping with someone's girlfriend for example. However in many instances the emphasis on toughness within the skinhead subculture probably plays a role in preventing the de-escalation of conflicts. Because

backing down from a fight is likely to be viewed as weakness by other skinheads, many crew members were unwilling to change their behavior in order to avoid a fight. This tendency was probably reinforced by the fact that many of the conflicts occurred in the presence of other skinheads.

Social Ties and Violence

While conflicts in the crews often involve violence, not all conflicts were resolved violently. The relationship between the crew members involved in a conflict was seen to have an effect on conflict outcomes. The respondents reported that when the people involved in a conflict were close friends, the conflicts tended to be resolved without violence:

> If you have a pretty close situation, like you grew up together. Now I'm not going to beat you up. But it might come to blows depending on how bad it gets.

> Really, it's mostly physical, unless you're dealing with a really close friend.

> Friends who are, you know, good friends are going to handle disputes however they handle them between themselves.

The case data presented a less clear picture of the effect of relationship on violent outcomes. Sixty one percent of the violent in-group conflicts occurred between crew members who were considered to be friends while 39% were between those who were not close friends. In addition, all of the 5 cases where there were serious injuries as the result of a violent conflict involved conflicts between skinheads identified as friends. One possible explanation for this finding is that because of the nature of the crews friends were likely to spend

much more time together than they spent with other members of the crew. This would provide more opportunities for conflict. It is also possible that serious offenses may be considered more egregious coming from a friend thus engendering a more severe reaction.

Violence and Status

Fights between crew members tended to be between skinheads of relatively equal status. This was the case in 87% of violent in-group conflicts. Part of the explanation for this lies in the respect that the younger skinheads tended to show toward the veteran skinheads. In order for a younger skinhead to be involved in a fight with an older skinhead they would first have to offend the older skinhead, or actively pursue a grievance against them, and second, escalate the conflict to the point of violence. Since both of these would require the younger skinhead to violate some of the crew's norms, this type of conflict was relatively uncommon:

> You didn't see that very often. If a young guy fucked with an older guy that was a fucking bad scene. Then you'd see an old school beat-down, and no one is going to step in to break it up . . . because you fucked up bad . . . You probably wouldn't see that kid again.

Respect was identified as an important factor in the relationship between the older skinheads and the younger skinheads. It may also partly explain the lack of upward and downward conflict seen in the crews. Individuals who do not show sufficient respect for the older skinheads are likely to be corrected by either their peers or by an older skinhead. Those who display a pattern of disrespectful behavior are not likely to remain members of the crew for long. In a sense the

hierarchy in the crews is self-sustaining, in that those who refuse to accept the order of things either leave or are weeded out. Those that remain must be willing to accept the status that their age and tenure in the crew dictates.

Another factor that played a role in limiting the amount of fighting between skinheads of different status levels was the fact that the veteran skinheads tended to be more experienced fighters than the younger skinheads. They were older, had been in more fights and in some cases had spent time in prison. As one skinhead described the veteran skinheads he knew:

> Most of these guys are pretty tough characters, when they fight, they can fight.

Reputedly, when full-blown fights between veterans and younger skinheads did occur they tended to be short and vicious. When a fight of this type occurred it served to reinforce the hierarchical order of the group, especially since these types of events were likely to be discussed, especially among the younger skinheads, for a long period of time. In contrast, most of the violence the veteran skinheads directed at the younger skinheads was relatively minor and considered to be corrective in nature:

> It was never anything too violent because the young guys tended to listen to the older guys. You know a slap in the head if somebody's being stupid. I guess the older guys just helped the younger guys to a point.

In my sample of cases there were 2 instances where an older skinhead violently pursued a grievance against a younger crew member. Neither of these cases involved serious injury. This was likely due to the fact that in both cases

as soon as the older skinheads reacted violently the younger skinheads involved immediately capitulated and apologized for their behavior:

> This kid was running his mouth at me. Showing off. I guess he thought he was some kind of tough guy or something. So I smacked him . . . pretty hard I guess. Then he's like dogging me . . . trying to stare me down. So I was like "I've fucking had enough of this." And I just wailed on him, four of five good punches. He was done. He was like, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, stop, stop."

Third Parties and Violence

The majority of the in-group conflicts occurred when other people were present. Third parties were present in 74% of the cases of in-group conflict. These third parties were most often other members of the crew. In 90% of the cases of conflict that involved third parties the majority of the third parties present were friends or associates of both sides. This is likely a function of the fact the crews tended to socialize within a fairly closed social circle.

Some research on violence suggests that the presence of an audience is a factor that increases the likelihood of violence (Lofland, 1969; Hepburn, 1973; Luckenbill, 1977; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Felson, Ribner and Siegel, 1984; Tedeschi and Felson, 1994). However, in this study the presence of the third parties did not in itself seem to increase the likelihood of violent outcomes. Third parties were present in almost the same proportion of the violent conflicts, 74% as they were in the conflicts that did not end violently, 73%. However, the presence of third parties did seem to influence conflicts in a number of ways.

Third Parties and Sources of Conflict

Many of the skinheads I interviewed suggested that the social context in which the conflict occurred influenced conflict resolution. The setting and the composition of the audience were factors that were identified as playing a role in determining whether a conflict was handled violently:

> I think it really depends. I think it depends if they are talking about you....on what the circumstances are, if there are girls around.

The passive influence of an audience can be illustrated by looking at disrespectful behavior as a source of violent conflict. In cases that did not involve any third parties, behavior defined as disrespectful was only identified as the source of 17% of conflicts, or 1 violent conflict out of 6. In cases where one or more third parties were present, disrespectful behavior was cited as the source of 47% of violent in-group conflicts. This suggests that in the presence of an audience skinheads were more likely to identify and react to disrespectful behavior. It may also be that in a group setting attempts at one-upmanship are more common as skinheads vie for status among their peers:

> We went to see this band, me and jack and a couple of the other guys and some girls. Jack got really stupid drunk, and, I think he was trying to show off . . . for the girls. So he starts snapping my braces. I told him to fuck off. Then he starts smacking me in the head, not hard but just, you know being an asshole. Well he did it again and I turned and punched him right in the face, straight on and fucking hard. He fell over, mostly from the booze I think, but his mouth was bleeding pretty good. [Several other skinheads] got between us. The whole thing just wasn't cool.

Third Parties and Alcohol

The relationship between alcohol and violence discussed earlier also becomes more complicated when third parties are taken into consideration. When no third parties were present at the time of a conflict, alcohol seemed to be a strong predictor of violence. Alcohol had been consumed in 80% of violent conflicts involving only principal parties. This compares to alcohol having been consumed in 25% of similar conflicts that were handled non-violently. Fights between skinheads that occurred in isolation from other crew members tended to be the product of a mixture of intoxication and petty grievances. They also tended to involve friends. The following case is an example of this scenario: After a night of drinking, Pete became angry when his equally intoxicated friend grabbed Pete's slice of pizza and pretended to eat it. Pete attacked the other skinhead punching and kicking him repeatedly. Due to the petty nature of the grievance and the influence of alcohol, the two were able to laugh about the incident the following day and it had no long term effect on their friendship.

In cases were third parties were present alcohol use was more common. Alcohol had been consumed in 69% of cases when third parties were present versus 46% of cases when no third parties were present. Since drinking among young people often occurs in a group setting, this finding is hardly surprising.

The relationship between alcohol and violence was less pronounced in cases that involved third parties. When third parties were present the aggrieved skinhead had been consuming alcohol in 76% of violent cases, and all parties in the conflict had been consuming alcohol in 71% of violent cases. In non-violent

cases all parties had been consuming alcohol in 64% of cases. The above findings seem to suggest that the relationship between alcohol consumption and conflict handling is linked to the social structure of a given case. I calculated a Chi-square statistic and an odds ratio for the relationship between alcohol and violence in the crew. I found that although the results of the odds ratio suggested that the odds of violence were greater when alcohol had been consumed by the first principal party or both principal parties in a conflict, this relationship was not statistically significant at the a=0.1 level of significance.

Third Party Responses to In-group Conflicts

Fights within the crew tended to involve only the skinheads who had a dispute. Other crew members tended not to actively participate in the conflicts. In 41% of all conflicts and 53% of violent conflicts the third parties present did not intervene in the conflict to try to prevent it from escalating. It was when the crew members did not intervene in conflicts that violence was most likely to occur. More than half of these conflicts (56%) ended violently.

Since the crew members had ties to all of the parties in an in-group conflict, physical intervention on the behalf of one of the parties in the conflict was less common. At least one third party took sides in about 36% of all conflicts, and about 24% of all violent conflicts. The majority of third parties aligned themselves with one side or the other in a conflict in 23% of all conflicts and 18% of violent conflicts:

> As far as taking sides within the group, I don't think so really. I mean unless somebody really fucked up and did something really stupid.

In-group conflicts where third parties took sides had some distinctive characteristics. They were not the spontaneous, alcohol soaked conflicts that were often seen among the skinheads. Alcohol was rarely a factor in these conflicts. Where the principal parties had been consuming alcohol in 69% of cases involving third parties, this was the case in only 10% of the conflicts where the third parties took sides. The sources of these conflicts also tended to be more serious and included heroin use, allegations of sexual relations with another crew member's girlfriend, and stealing from other crew members.

While the crew members were unlikely to become physically involved in the conflict on one side or the other, they might support one side if they feel that that person has a legitimate grievance against the other skinhead. This support would most likely take the form of agreeing with the legitimacy of the grievance and telling the aggrieved party that they need to act:

> The boys would say "we know this guy's going to beat you up, but he slept with your girlfriend, go do something about it," and if you didn't you're [seen as] weak.

In conflicts with opponents of equal status crew members were unlikely to attempt to summon allies. Such attempts ran the risk of being viewed as an unwillingness to handle one's own affairs in the expected manner. Since most of the skinheads were willing to engage in violent behavior, it was easier to fight than to run the risk of being seen as weak:

> For the most part the guys don't need backup. If you piss them off they'll beat the fuck out of you.

In some instances the other crew members tried to intercede in conflicts between members. In 26% of all in-group cases and 24% of violent cases the majority of third parties took on the role of peacemakers and attempted to prevent the conflict from escalating.

While the crew did not always take steps to prevent conflicts from escalating to violence, they did tend to act to limit the physical harm crew members inflicted on each other in physical conflicts. Once a fight had an obvious winner, the other crew members present would usually step in to prevent any serious harm from befalling the loser:

> If it was two guys everyone generally got along with, generally they'd let them handle it. If they were going to fight, let them fight. I mean, nobody's going to stand by and let anyone get beat up too badly.
>
> As soon as someone started losing, the guys would jump in and break the fight up. They wouldn't let anyone get pounded.

Status and Third Party Behavior

Status influenced third party behavior in conflicts in a number of ways. Both the status of the principals in a conflict, and the relative status of interested third parties seemed to be factors that influenced how third parties would behave in a conflict. When I analyzed information on the status and behavior of 101 individual third parties present during in-group conflicts, a pattern of status influenced behavior emerged. I identified 25 individual third parties who were of lower status than both principal parties in a conflict. When third parties were of lower status than the principles in a conflict, they tended to stay out of the conflict. This was the behavior of 76% of these lower status third parties:

Al, an older skinhead, developed a serious romantic relationship with a young woman who had been hanging around with some female friends of the crewmembers. Unbeknownst to Al, Ben, another older crew member, who has had issues with Al in the past, had a sexual encounter with the woman prior to her relationship with Al. Ben told several crewmembers lurid details of his encounter with the woman, and Al eventually found out. Ben and several younger skinheads were drinking at Ben's apartment when Al showed up with an axe. The younger skinheads sat and watched as Al chased Ben who managed to jump out a window and escape.

Eleven third parties were lower in status than one principal party in a conflict but equal in status to the other. When third parties were lower in status than one of the parties in a conflict, but equal in status to the other, they also tended to stay out of conflicts. This was the case for 64% of third parties in this situation. In both of these situations third parties that didn't stay out of the conflict attempted to act as peacemakers. It is notable that lower status third parties only acted as peacemakers when status equals of the principal parties were also acting as peacemakers.

Fifty-eight third parties were status equals of both principal parties in a conflict. When third parties were peers of both parties in a conflict the widest variety of third party behavior was seen. In this scenario third party behavior was split almost equally between inaction (36%), partisanship (34%), and peacemaking (29%). Third party involvement in conflicts was more likely than when third parties were lower status with 64% of equal status third parties becoming involved in conflicts.

In conflicts between skinheads of unequal status, the presence of third parties who were peers of the higher status skinhead seemed to produce consistent patterns of third party behavior. The third parties who were peers of

the higher status party in the conflict always supported their status equal. All other third parties present stayed out of these conflicts. The skinheads displayed a clear awareness of this latter dynamic:

> When I was in [a crew] there was a guy who was a bit of a wuss. He would talk big but never really did much. He'd been around for a while and he was tight with the other old skins. That guy always rubbed me the wrong way and I always wanted to just beat the fuck out of him and show everyone what a pussy he was, though I think most people kind of knew already. . . Why didn't I? He was a wuss but his friends were fucking hardcore cats, I didn't want to fuck with those guys.

Higher status third parties rarely intervened in conflicts where both principal parties were lower status. If higher status parties did intervene, it was generally a nonpartisan intervention. However if a higher status skinhead did take sides in a conflict between two lower status third parties they effectively elevated the status of the side they took changing the structure of the conflict:

> Dave was one of the older guys. He and I used to drink together once in a while, he was a good guy. There were these two guys [in the crew] Kenny and Jeff who were really tight. These two guys used to pal around together. There was a bit of a problem between me and them. I know they were planning something; they were planning to jump me. I know this for a fact because they told me later. So they had this plan, but Dave intervened and told them to leave me alone. I know that for a fact. And I don't really know why he did. We got along okay, but I don't know. Maybe he liked me. He just told them, "leave him alone."

Violent Group Action

> If we, as a group were to beat you [an outsider] up that's okay, but for the group to beat me up, being one of them, is not good.

If the members of the crew take sides and physically participate in a conflict it generally means that someone has committed a serious transgression.

In this type of situation the members of the crew will be likely to turn against the offending member. When the transgression is very serious the other members of the crew might engage in collective violent action against the offender. As mentioned earlier, cooperating with law enforcement was seen as very serious and several respondents used that scenario as an example of a situation where the group might engage in collective violence against a member:

> If they think that you're ratting them out, they'll do something to you, they might just smash you up a little bit, try to scare you, shut you up.
>
> If you went and told the cops on someone, you're in a lot of trouble, they're going to get you.

The general consensus was that collective violence directed at a crew member was intended to hurt and scare the recipient. It also probably served as a way for the crew to distance themselves from a former friend who was no longer welcome. In cases like this the violence was not really a group punishment per say as the offending member would not be allowed to remain in the crew. It was collective retaliation for the transgression. None of my respondents admitted to knowing of any case where collective action against a group member had resulted in the person's death, nor did they report to know of any cases where the crew planned or attempted to kill an offending member.

Collective violence directed at a member of the crew seems to have been a rare occurrence. I only heard first hand accounts of one such incident. The case involved a notoriously tough older skinhead who had begun to make a habit of bullying and taunting his peers in the crew. This behavior was a source of great annoyance to the other older skinheads, especially when it occurred in the

presence of other people. They eventually decided that they had had enough and collectively resolved to teach the offending crew member a lesson. A younger crew member gave an account of the events that followed:

> The older guys turned on him. One person couldn't beat him up, and this was a small man, so they all beat him up. They really fucked him up. They tried to get him down, but they couldn't get him down, so they smashed a baseball bat over the back of his head.

It was also reported that the skinheads would occasionally engage in collective violence against one of their own if the person was doing something that offended the sensibilities of the group. The stimulus in these instances tended to be less serious than those discussed above:

> If you were sleeping with my girlfriend or something, and I didn't do nothing, they might ride me, or give me a beating, depending on how drunk they are.

Aftermath of Violent Conflict

One of the interesting questions about the skinhead crews is how they maintain some sort of solidarity given the level of violent internal conflict that seems to be present. One stumbling block for the outside observer may be the assumption that violent conflict is destructive in nature. However the modern liberal view of violence, that violence never solves anything, is not shared by the skinheads. In fact, the skinheads I interviewed dismissed this as "hippy bullshit" and pointed out that violence did in fact resolve disputes within the crews:

> Two guys get into a fight there's a winner, there's a loser.

> You got to fix it. If you lose, there's no respect lost. You, as a man, went to him and confronted him.

If one accepts the skinheads' view that conflicts can be clearly resolved by a fight, it might also be assumed that the skinhead on the losing end of the fight would accept that they lost and the dispute would be considered closed. While this might occur in relatively minor disputes it seems unlikely that this would be the case if the dispute is over something serious. In fact it seems the aftermath of a violent conflict is quite a bit more complicated. What occurs in the wake of a fight depends on a number of factors including the relationship between the parties involved and the nature of the offense:

> What would happen after? Well it would depend. They could be good friends, and they'd just settle it themselves. But it could result in anything from nothing, "the fights done, lets have a beer," or if it was over something serious, it could result in one guy losing and just never coming back around again.

There was a tendency for people who were dissatisfied with the outcome of conflicts to leave the crew. It may be as a result of this that I found little evidence of significant ongoing conflicts between crewmembers in any of the crews in the study. In the following case a skinhead describes the conflict that led to one of his friends leaving the crew:

> We were drunk, really fucking wasted. We were walking home . . . me and my roommate [another crewmember] and we got into an argument, actually, I guess it was mostly me. I was really fucking angry. He started to walk away and I punched him in the back of the head. We started fighting and I grabbed him and threw him into this store window . . . A big glass window. He went right through it. Got cut up and needed to go to the hospital. I was on probation for that for a while . . . not for hurting [him], for destruction of property. After that he moved out, and was hanging out less. . . It was probably 4 or 5 months, then after that we didn't see him much anymore.

Nonviolent Conflict Outcomes

While the members of the skinhead crews often engage in violence to resolve their internal group conflicts, the management of conflicts in the crews is not limited to violent solutions. The crew members also used a variety of nonviolent strategies to handle conflicts. My respondents reported that in addition to violence, other forms of conflict resolution including avoidance, tolerance, and negotiation were also used to handle conflicts among group members.

Avoidance

Avoidance is the intentional avoiding of people you do not wish to interact with. Avoidance was the most common form of non-violent conflict handing used in the crews, occurring in 23% of the in-group conflicts. Avoidance was equally likely to be used in conflicts with friends or associates. Avoidance can occur both in the short term and the long term. Both short term and long term avoidance were employed by members of the crews as a means of handling conflicts:

> You would avoid them generally.

> Guys wouldn't want to go to a bar just because another guy was there that they didn't want to run into, because it would be a fight.

> He might just not come around for a couple of weeks and then sort of come back with his tail between his legs . . . They got to show back up around because everybody hangs out here. They can hopefully slide in and nobody will take to much notice.

Many crew members would use short term avoidance rather than having to fight with another crew member. Avoidance was sometimes also used if a crew member was annoyed or angry at the behavior of another member:

> I was drinking all the time, basically went from being a weekend alcoholic to a full-time alcoholic, and some of the boys were like "You know you've got a drinking problem." And I was pissed off and told them to fuck off, you know? It's none of your business. And for a little while I was sort of like, I wasn't part of the group; I hung out a lot by myself. Then I realized that they were pretty much right.

Long term avoidance took the form of voluntarily leaving a crew. This was generally caused by a member's dissatisfaction with the crew or with some of the other crew members:

> A guy gets beat up, he doesn't want to get beat up again, so he just never comes back.

> They stop hanging out because they choose to, or they stop hanging out because they are no longer welcome, and I can see how it could be both.

One former skinhead gave the following account of the circumstances surrounding his leaving a crew:

> The first time I went to jail, not juvie [juvenile detention] but jail, I met a couple of guys that I got on with pretty well. They were bikers. Once I was out and they were out I started hanging with them some of the time, and some of the skins had a problem with it. I guess too, my hair got longer and I didn't really want to cut it, I wasn't really wearing my skinhead shit, just jeans and boots. It was kinda like, "are you a skin or not." I just wasn't into it as much anymore, so when they started hassling me about shit, I just stopped hanging out.

Avoidance and Status. While the majority of conflicts handled with avoidance were between peers, 33% were between skinheads of unequal status. All of the unequal status cases involved a grievance against a higher status

skinhead. Avoidance was employed in 44% of upward directed conflicts. When conflicts were between peers, 20% were handled using avoidance.

Expulsion. Expulsion is a form of avoidance. Avoidance can be either voluntary or involuntary. Expulsion is an involuntary form of avoidance. Expulsion was not as common as people choosing to leave the crew, but it did occur:

> Definitely people have been run out of the scene, for sure.
>
> You'd have to do something really stupid. Like if you ratted somebody out to the cops or something like that. Of course then you're never going to come back unless you're really stupid.
>
> If you called the cops on somebody, well, you just wrote yourself off really. You could never go back.

The expulsion of crew members did not seem to be a function of any sort of formal process. Status in the group certainly played a role because only higher status members had the influence required to have someone expelled:

> There was always a core group of guys that were pretty tight, and you'd get guys coming and going and hanging out. If somebody [in the core group] didn't like somebody they brought it up. So, if they say, "Naw, I don't like that fucking guy, I don't want him around." Nobody's going to say too much. . . There's not like a committee or anything.

Several respondents mentioned that violent behavior could get a person expelled from the group. While this might seem strange given the general willingness of crew members to engage in violence and the emphasis on violence in the skinhead subculture, it seems that even the skinheads view violence as inappropriate in certain contexts:

> In my case it wasn't too violent, it was just misplaced violence. I mean being violent in the wrong place at the wrong time. That can definitely get guys, you know, "don't come around anymore," type of thing.

While expulsion from the group might in some circumstances involve collective violence against the person being expelled, it seems to have usually involved a curtailment of interaction with that person:

> They wouldn't call you, they wouldn't talk to you, they wouldn't hang out with you. They wouldn't invite you over to dinner or to drink beer or nothing.
>
> Ignore you and make you almost leave on your own by ignoring you and stuff.

One skinhead described an instance where his crew had used this approach to sever ties to a crew member whose drug use had become unacceptable to the other members of the crew:

> One guy in the past had been a junkie, but he cleaned himself up. They gave him the benefit of the doubt. Hung around with him for years, probably 2 years he was clean, and he was doing really good, and all the boys liked him, and he was working. All of a sudden his addictions kicked in and he wanted some smack and he did some. Boys just said, "Get the fuck out of here!" you know, "You're wasting our time kid. Don't hang around with us." That type of thing. They just told him to fuck off. They wouldn't call him, they just blocked him outright. He just went about his own business, hung around with junkies again. Fucked himself up.

Once the crew ceased interaction with a former member, that person generally seems to have understood their situation and accepted it. They might join another crew, or cease to be a skinhead altogether:

> You'd probably just drag yourself off. You'd probably be trying to leave anyway if that kind of shit was going on.

> If it's to the point that you're getting booted out, if it's that serious, there's no way you could stay. You'd have to be fucked in the head to want to stay. I can think of one case where that happened and that guy was just a crazy fucker.

The lack of both functional dependence among crew members and significant barriers to leaving a crew contributed to the incidents of both avoidance and expulsion. The exit of individual members, whether voluntary or coerced, seemed to have little long term effect and the crews were able to continue over time with a relatively fluid membership. If the crews did not have these characteristics it is unlikely that these forms of conflict management would be as frequently used.

Tolerance

Tolerance is inaction, the act of choosing not to respond to an offense. About 13% of in-group conflicts were handled by doing nothing. Crew members would tolerate behaviors from some people that they would not tolerate from others. Factors such as status, relationship, physical size, fighting ability, and the social context of the conflict would all play a role in whether a person with a grievance will act or not. My respondents gave the following examples of situations in which crew members may choose to do nothing:

> Because you know you're going to lose the fight.

> If the big guys are riding you, you've just got to suck it up.

> If [one of the older crew members] pissed me off, what the fuck am I going to do about it? Not a fucking thing.

Status plays a major role in determining whether a crew member will act on a grievance or not. If a grievance is against a higher status member there is an increased chance of inaction. Inaction was used in less than 8% of cases when conflicts involved peers. However, in conflicts involving grievances against higher status crew members, inaction was practiced in over 44% of cases:

> The older guys were really wasted and they were putting people [younger skinheads] in these wrestling holds. They'd body slam somebody and then all cheer. One of the guys put me in the sleeper . . . it's a chokehold where a guy puts his arm around your throat from behind and squeezes real hard. Pretty fucking dangerous. I passed out and the guy just let go and I fell face down on the floor, chipped my tooth and I think I busted my nose. That fucking sucked big time. You get mad about shit like that but there really isn't much you can do.

Inaction was not used in conflicts with lower status crew members. The respondents suggested that there is little to be gained by pursuing a conflict against a higher status crew member. There are however, a number of negative consequences inherent in doing so:

> Some kids want to be tough guys right away, but, you're going to get teased and pushed around, hazed, early on. If you can't deal with that you aren't going to be around for long.

The strength of social ties between the parties in a dispute also seems to influence the incidence of inaction. Inaction was more likely to occur in conflicts between associates rather than between friends. In 86% of the cases that involved inaction the conflict was between associates. This can be partly explained by the fact that hierarchical distance between the parties in a conflict tends to be accompanied by relational distance. The crew members' friends tended to be those on their own status level.

Other crew members may also factor into the choice of whether to act or not:

> It could be that I just don't like you; I don't like you because of this reason. But the other guys like you so I'm not going to do nothing.

> They'd tell him to just fucking ignore it, deal with it, this is a good guy.

If the other party in a conflict seems to have the support of other members of the crew, then inaction or avoidance might be seen as a good strategy because pursuing the grievance could lead to a conflict with other crew members. When the majority of third party support was behind the other party in a conflict, the aggrieved skinheads used non-violent conflict handling strategies in 80% of the conflicts.

Negotiation

Negotiation occurs when the two sides in a conflict discuss their grievances and come up with a mutually acceptable solution. Negotiation was used to resolve about 11% of the in-group conflicts. Two factors that respondents suggested played a role in the success of negotiations were the relationship between the parties in conflict and the seriousness of the offense. It was suggested that negotiations were more successful between close friends, and that those conflicts were less likely to escalate to violence:

> If we're friends we'd probably talk it out first.

Negotiation was used most frequently in conflicts between friends. In 83% of the conflicts resolved using negotiation, the conflict was between friends. The

friends in these cases were also all of relatively equal status, so the majority of negotiation can also be said to occur in lateral conflicts:

> I loaned Ron [another crewmember] some cash so he could pay his rent and was supposed to pay me as soon as he got his paycheck. So I see Pete [another crewmember] and he says, "Ron asked me what I thought you'd do if he doesn't pay you back right away." Pete said he told Ron that that was a bad idea and that he should pay me back as soon as possible. So I'm pretty pissed about the whole situation. The boys got together and there's Ron and he has beer, so he's got some cash, but he doesn't come up to me or anything. I said, "If you have money for beer you should have money to pay me back." Ron said that his paycheck had been small but he gave me some cash and promised to pay me the rest out of the next check, and he did.

Negotiation was also seen to be more successful in cases where the conflict was over something relatively minor. In some situations other group members would encourage the parties to negotiate or even act as mediators to bring the conflict to a resolution:

> The boys might say, "Look man, he was drunk, just let it go." Maybe we can talk to the guy or something, and see if we can get an apology or something.

Several respondents mentioned scenarios where the crew as a collective might negotiate with a single member. This might happen if a member's behavior was considered to be generally unacceptable. In this situation the other members of the crew might inform the individual member of their concerns and their expectations for the future:

> If they've got a problem with you they'll let you know, give you a chance to straighten things out.

If the offending member and the rest of the crew cannot reach a mutually acceptable solution, that member would probably be expelled from the crew.

Gossip

Gossip involves in trying to damage someone's reputation by spreading negative information about them. The use of gossip was reported within the crews. The use of gossip was seen as a way of turning crew members against a person, or getting them to sympathize with one side in a conflict:

> Like, say you and me were in a group and I found out I had to take care of you, but I knew deep down that I couldn't beat you up. Well then I'd go to my buddies and say, "we got to get rid of this guy now, he's a fucking big mouth." Maybe spread a few rumors among them, turn them against you.

> What the person would probably do is badmouth you and try to get the other guys to turn against you. But for the most part they're pretty decent that way, and they know that it is none of their business.

The use of gossip was seen as a risky proposition. Due to the small group size, the subject of the gossip was likely to find out about it. There was also a risk that other members of the crew would find the use of gossip offensive and react negatively:

> Somebody just sitting around whining about it, everybody's just going to look at you going, "that guy's a whiner." They'd probably lose some respect for you.

> It would definitely lower your standing in the group, especially if you were perceived to be some sort of tough guy.

Although there were no cases in my sample where gossip was used to redress a grievance, there were several cases were the grievance was prompted by gossip spread by another person.

Discussion

The various types of nonviolent conflict management used in the crews illustrates that much of the variation in the form of conflict handling used is a function of the hierarchical and lateral relationships between the parties in a conflict. The lack of functional dependence between group members allows people to leave when they become dissatisfied with the group. Crew members are more likely to be tolerant of the behavior of higher status members than that of their peers. Peers with closer social ties are more likely to negotiate to resolve a grievance than those who are not as close. In all of these situations the choice to use violence, or engage in an alternative form of conflict management seems to be a function of the organization of the crews and the relationships between those in dispute.

The characteristics of the crews play an important role in shaping how conflicts among members are handled. The organization of the crews in terms of hierarchy and integration, and the relationships between the members of a crew play a significant role in shaping the nature of conflict management in the group. In the case of the skinhead crews, a degree of violence that would be unacceptable and destructive in many other types of collectives is not only tolerated but in some instances actively encouraged. This is not only a product of the groups' internal norms, but also due to the structural characteristics of the crews. Because of the characteristics of the crews, especially the low levels of functional dependence between the crew members, the relatively high levels of

internal violence do not, in most instances, seem to have a damaging effect on the organization.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Characteristics of Racist Skinhead Violence

In the course of my research I found little support for the idea that the typical case of racist skinhead violence involves a group of skinheads descending on a stranger, often perceived to be a member of a racial or ethnic minority group. This is not to say that racist skinheads do not pose a threat to members of minority groups, but rather that most skinhead violence has a different character. I am not the first academic researcher to question this often repeated conception of skinhead violence; several others who have studied skinheads on a first-hand basis have reached similar conclusions (Baron, 1997; Smith, 2000).

The focus on certain aspects of skinhead violence may have contributed to an overemphasis on its more unique aspects. For example, Hamm (1993; 2001) argued that the theoretical formulations that were used to explain traditional gang behavior could not explain skinhead behavior. He stressed the ideological aspect of the subculture, proposing that skinheads constituted a unique type of group which he described as a "terrorist youth subculture". I would argue that by emphasizing what he considered to be the uniqueness of the skinheads, their perceived ideological motivation, Hamm restricted the scope of

his own analysis. He focused on how the skinheads are different than other groups, but did not consider the ways in which they might be similar.

In contrast the analysis of conflicts suggested that skinhead violence has many similarities to the general characteristics of assault. The violence the crew members were involved in was observed to be largely intra-racial in nature. The majority of the participants in the conflicts were young males. The conflicts tended to arise spontaneously from insults or arguments. The majority of the participants in the conflicts were previously acquainted. The majority of both first and second parties had been consuming alcohol at the time of the conflicts. These characteristics suggest that in many regards skinhead violence is hardly unique, but rather has many of the characteristics of typical assault behavior (Miethe and Meier, 1994; Miethe and McCorkle, 2001).

Racism and White Supremacist Ideology

I found little evidence to support a direct causal link between racist ideology and racist skinhead violence. Hamm (1993) argued that young people were attracted to the racist skinhead subculture because of pre-existing racist beliefs and values that coincide with the white supremacist themes in skinhead music and imagery. However, the evidence from my study and a number of other sources suggests that many skinheads have little exposure to white-supremacist ideology and music before they become skinheads (Kinsella, 1994; Blazak, 1995; Smith, 2000). Some sources suggest that many individuals who join extremist groups are initially uncomfortable with the ideological aspects of the group but once in the group, constant exposure to group ideology makes it

seem less disturbing (Aho, 1990; Kinsella, 1994). My interview data provided general support for this argument. In addition, I found that many of the skinheads I interviewed were skeptical of, or disinterested in, adult white supremacist organizations.

Smith argued that, "skinheads are motivated by culture, adult racists depend on ideology" (2000: 133). This may be an important distinction for unraveling some of the confusion and misunderstandings about skinhead behavior. Most of the crewmembers seemed more invested in being skinheads than in being white supremacists. Many skinhead behaviors seemed to be more strongly linked to subcultural factors than to ideological factors. The argument that racist skinheads are violent because of their racism runs up against the problem that while not all skinheads are racist, all of the various factions of skinheads tend to glorify violence.

The influence of subcultural factors on racist skinhead behavior can make the role of ideology difficult to assess. For some skinheads it seems to be little more than a fashion accessory. For many skinheads the ideological orientation of their crew may not be an entirely accurate reflection of their own beliefs. Many skinheads have been members of racist and apolitical or anti-racist crews. How can we tell which of these allegiances reflects their true beliefs? On both the racist and anti-racist sides, while there seemed to be an ample willingness to fight those on the other side, more conventional forms of political involvement were notably absent.

Another piece of evidence against the causal racism/violence argument is the lack of a clear pattern of victimization of minorities. Whether this was caused by a lack of opportunity or a lack of inclination, the relatively small number of conflicts involving members of minority groups seems to refute the notion that violence directed at minorities was typical skinhead violence. In my study the majority of violent conflicts involved people the skinheads encountered in the course of their usual activities or at rival groups, largely consisting of other young white males. This is consistent with the findings of several other studies (Baron, 1997; Smith, 2000).

Collective Liability

While I found little evidence of a causal link between white supremacist ideology and violent conflict handling across cases, I did find evidence that the skinheads employed the logic of collective liability when dealing with members of minority groups and homosexuals. Conflicts with white strangers, especially with those who had no obvious subcultural affiliation, tended to revolve around specific provocations and only involve those individuals present at the time. In conflicts with members of minority groups and homosexuals, the grievance could be the product of the color of a person's skin or their sexual preference. Homosexuals especially were subject to harassment and physical violence. The skinheads seemed to view any homosexual as fair game for victimization. Interestingly, I found that this dislike of homosexuals to be shared by some of the supposedly tolerant SHARP skinheads. In a conversation about homosexuals who dress like skinheads, a SHARP skinhead offered the following opinion:

"Fucking fetish faggots, I fucking hate that shit! Real skinheads aren't fucking faggots! I wish they would all get fucking AIDS and die!"

Alcohol and Violence

Hamm (1993) argued that "beer intoxication" linked exposure to white-supremacist ideology and violent behavior by skinheads when their beliefs were challenged by outsiders. I did not find support for this argument. The fact that the skinheads were usually drinking when out in public as a group presents a problem in that "beer intoxication" could be associated with virtually any skinhead behavior.

Any skinhead social gathering is likely to involve heavy drinking. However, behavior linked to drinking varied by venue and who was present. When looking at both conflicts that were handled violently and those that were not, I found little evidence that conflicts with outsiders where a skinhead had been drinking were more likely to be handled violently. In contrast, conflicts between members of the crew seemed to be a little more likely to become violent after alcohol had been consumed. In general, the skinheads might act violently when sober or avoid violence when intoxicated. These variable responses seem to be largely a product of the social structure of a given conflict.

Skinhead Violence as Moralistic Behavior

Some of the previous research on skinhead violence has suggested that violence is often described by skinheads as a moralistic act, an act that punishes a wrong-doer (Katz, 1988; Hamm, 1993; Moore, 1994; Baron, 1997; Schafer and

Navarro, 2003). While most of us are unlikely to share the skinheads' moral compass, viewing skinhead violence in this way helps to make sense of where, when, and with whom, the skinheads engage in violence.

Where the approach I use in this study views violent action as one possible outcome out of many, some other theories of violence view violence as a means to a desired goal, as an instrumental act. For example, the subculture of violence theory suggests that violence is a means by which members of certain subcultural groups maintain or advance their reputations. In this model people are said to face negative consequences if they fail to meet social expectations regarding the use of violence to handle conflicts (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967; Anderson, 1999). While it might be tempting to apply a similar model to skinhead violence, my findings did not suggest that the skinheads gave much consideration to the consequences of their actions beyond the confines of the immediate conflict.

Two of the conflicts described in chapter 5, Stu punching a punk rocker through a glass window, and the collective assault of the SHARP Skinhead Matt, both illustrate the potentially self-destructive consequences of violent action for those who use it. Stu's course of action led to a self-inflicted injury. In the case of the assault on Matt, that course of action led to the disintegration of the racist skinhead crew. These cases suggest that individuals engaging in violence may give little thought to the consequences of their actions. The focus is on causing injury to a person who is seen as the source of a grievance. These findings are similar to those of Berkowitz (1978) who found that the main intention of males in

violent confrontations was to injure their opponents. This non-instrumental conception of violence helps explain why people engage in acts of violence over often trivial matters seemingly without regard for legal sanctions or personal injury. Berkowitz attributes this lack of concern for consequences largely to anger, suggesting that social context is of little importance. This explanation is contradicted by the large amount of research pointing to the influence of social contexts and situational factors on violent behavior (Hepburn, 1973; Dyck, 1980; Farrington et al, 1982; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Felson et al, 1984; Baumgartner, 1988; Cooney, 1998; Philips and Cooney, 2005). Instead it could be argued that people engage in violence because the social structure of a conflict is conducive to the use of violent conflict management. From an instrumental standpoint the racist crewmembers' assault on Matt was a bad idea, serving to inflame a conflict they had no chance of winning. The fact that many of the skinheads left town soon after indicated awareness that their actions had "crossed the line." However, viewed from a structural standpoint the attack makes perfect sense. On one side are five angry racist skinhead crewmembers nursing a grievance, and on the other is a lone SHARP skinhead who represents the source of the grievance. The cries of "I want him dead" that accompanied the assault echo both the angry desire to cause injury to the offending party and a temporary lack of concern for the very serious consequences that accompany the act of homicide.

Skinhead Conflict Management

Using Donald Black's Structural Theory of Conflict Management allowed me to reconceptualize violence as one type of conflict management among the many possible ways in which a conflict could be handled. Rejecting the idea that only violent conflicts are important for understanding violence allowed for the consideration of both violent and non-violent conflicts. This, in turn, allowed me to move away from the conception of violent acts as an extension of violent tendencies and consider them in their own right. By examining both conflicts that were handled violently and those that were handled nonviolently I was able to identify some important factors relating to violent action among members of the skinhead crews.

Although the members of the skinhead crews could all be described as having some degree of violent tendencies, none of them used violence to handle all of their conflicts. Violent action was not a direct product of violent tendencies, nor was it the direct product of a grievance. What I found by comparing violent and nonviolent conflicts was that the absence of violence did not indicate the absence of violent tendencies or the absence of a grievance. Instead the use of nonviolent conflict management was linked to the absence of situational factors conducive to violent conflict handling. In short, the social structure of the conflict was not conducive to violent conflict management. I am not arguing that there are no underlying factors that promote violent behavior by individuals, but rather that the social structure of a conflict can explain when a person with violent tendencies is most likely to engage in violent action.

Violent Conflict Handling

Violent conflict management was used to handle conflicts both outside and inside the crews. Violence was more frequently employed in conflicts with outsiders. I calculated an odds ratio for the relationship between violent conflict management and the organizational status of the second party in a conflict. The odds of an out-group conflict being handled with violence were 2.19 times higher than the odds of an in-group conflict being handled with violence. This result was significant at a=0.05.

Despite the rivalries between the various skinhead factions conflicts with outsiders were least likely to become violent when the outsider was another skinhead. This seemed to be because, despite crew rivalries and ideological divisions the skinheads tended to know one another and on some levels they had a shared identity as skinheads. This fits with Black's model of self-help which predicts that closer relational and cultural ties reduce the likelihood of violent conflict management. In contrast conflicts with homosexuals were characterized by severe collective violence. The homosexuals in these conflicts were almost always strangers, and so were both relationally and culturally distant from the skinheads.

Second Party Characteristics

My findings suggest that the majority of people that skinheads came into conflict with were not sought out, but were rather encountered in the course of the skinheads' regular activities. There seemed to be two main factors that

increased the likelihood of a second party becoming involved in a conflict with skinheads. These factors could be described as physical proximity and cultural proximity.

Physical Proximity. With a few exceptions, the skinheads did not seem to make much of an effort to find people to assault or fight. Most people who were involved in violent conflicts with skinheads seemed to be people who the skinheads encountered as they went about their usual routine. This finding is not unique to my research. The same sentiment is illustrated by the comments of a former racist skinhead, "...90 percent of my victims were white because it was rare for somebody black, Hispanic, or Asian to be walking down my street" (T.J. Leyden cited in SPLC, 1998). Likewise, Baron (1997) suggested that the lack of racial conflicts involving the racist crew he studied may have been a function of a limited number of potential minority victims in the area in which the skinheads congregated.

Cultural Proximity. Many of those who were involved in conflicts with members of the skinhead crews were other crewmembers, other skinheads, both racist and non-racist, and members of related subcultures, such as punk rockers. Often these people moved in inter-related "scenes" going to many of the same hangouts the skinheads frequented. Such people can be seen as being culturally close to the skinheads without necessarily having close relational ties to them.

Cultural proximity also played a role in ongoing group conflicts. The majority of such conflicts were with other skinheads or members of related

subcultures. This may reflect an understanding among members of these groups about how they are supposed to interact. The definition of some groups as rivals or enemies may be based on learned subcultural perceptions of those groups.

Despite the large amount of attention paid to skinhead violence against minority victims, my findings suggested that the most likely second parties in conflicts were those who were closest to the skinheads in cultural space. Whether conflicts were with strangers or not, the consistent finding was that the conflicts were most often with other young white males. This is consistent with the general characteristics of violent crime the majority of which involves people of the same race (Miethe and Meier, 1994; Miethe and McCorkle, 2001).

The Role of Third Parties

Third Parties and Out-group Conflicts. One characteristic that sets skinhead violence apart from the majority of assault crime is its largely collective nature. The large majority of violent acts involve only two participants. Data from the 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey indicated that only about 10% of aggravated assaults involved more than one offender (Miethe and McCorkle, 2001). In contrast, a large proportion of the out-group conflicts involving skinhead crewmembers also involved skinhead third parties who joined the conflicts as partisans. This still does not make the skinheads unique however. There are other groups who also engage in collective acts of violence such as urban gangs and outlaw motorcycle clubs. The Hell's Angels motorcycle club even has partisanship requirements in the club's charter. By-law 10 of the

charter states, "When an Angel punches a non-Angel, all other Angels will participate" (Thompson, 1967: 72).

Why when most violence is individualized does the violence of the skinhead crews take on a collective character? One way to address this question is to look at why most violent behavior is individual. Drawing on Black's theoretical propositions Cooney (1998; 2003) argued that the move to privatized or individual violence was a function of both the growth of organized and effective legal systems and the weakening of social ties between individuals in modern societies. In developed societies people tend to look to the legal system to resolve their disputes and also to protect them from victimization. The weaker social ties between individuals associated with modernity decrease the likelihood of people being willing to act as partisans.

Skinheads, unlike the majority of people, can not be considered respectable citizens. Black argues that those people who are not respectable are less likely to use the law to resolve disputes (Black, 1976). When a youth adopts the skinhead style they are accepting a stigmatized outsider status. They become unrespectable and have less access to legal means of resolving conflicts. The skinheads were also young, and young people are generally more likely to use informal forms of social control, such as violence, than older people (Baumgartner, 1988).

The crewmembers also had social ties based not only on their membership in a crew, but also on their collective identity as racist skinheads. Unlike most members of society skinheads are often surrounded by a group of

potential partisans. The very presence of such potential partisans may encourage individuals to escalate disputes (Felson et al, 1984; Black, 1998; Cooney, 1998; Miethe and McCorkle, 2001; Philips and Cooney, 2005).

Skinheads, along with urban gangs, outlaw motorcycle clubs and other similar social formations, manifest characteristics that are not typical in a developed society. They eschew formal law in favor of informal social control. They have a collective orientation and identify themselves as a distinct group through the use of style and symbols. Their tendency to act as partisans in conflicts involving their fellow crewmembers is a function of their solidarity in the face of outside threats.

Third Parties and In-group Conflicts. In conflicts between crew members, third parties were likely to remain neutral and let the principal parties resolve their issues. If a conflict escalated to violence third parties would often break up the fight before anyone was seriously injured. The behavior of third parties in in-group conflicts was a function of their cross-cutting social ties to both disputants in a conflict.

Crew Structure and Conflict Management

Crew Organization

The lack of formal organization in the skinhead crews distinguishes them from groups that have more formalized hierarchies. Outlaw motorcycle clubs and university fraternities both have more formal hierarchical structures with elected officers who perform specific duties for the organization. These groups also have formalized codes of conduct that can be enforced by the group. The rules are

known to everyone and the violation of the rules is met with specific consequences. Both the nature of authority and the rules by which the skinhead crews operate are much more ambiguous.

The status structure of the crews was maintained over time by the fact that those who did not like the way things were organized either became dissatisfied and left or were expelled from the crew. Although the status hierarchies of the crews were largely informal, status played a major role in shaping the dynamics of conflict among crewmembers. Because the majority of skinheads who were in the crew treated the status structure as legitimate, conflicts were almost exclusively between status equals. Crewmembers were protected from upward directed conflict management by the status structure. A lower status crewmember that had a grievance against a higher status skinhead would generally do nothing. There were so few upward cases were described to me during my research that I began to suspect that the lower status skinheads simply expected to be treated badly and did not identify such mistreatment as deviant behavior.

Functional Dependence and Social Fluidity

One of the most interesting things about the skinhead crews is that the members displayed some characteristics that would normally be associated with groups with high levels of functional interdependence and also some characteristics usually associated with low levels of functional interdependence. The skinheads often displayed a high degree of solidarity in out-group conflicts, often becoming physically involved in conflicts involving other crew members or

participating in on-going conflicts. High levels of solidarity are usually associated with functional interdependence (Senechal De La Roche, 2001). However the tendency of group members to use avoidance, either in the short or long term, to handle in-group conflicts suggests a low level of functional dependence. One way to make sense of the seeming contradictions between out-group and in-group conflict management is to conceive of the crew as a collection of individuals who rely on the collective to aid them in maintaining their personal skinhead identities. In this sense each member of the crew is dependent on his fellow crewmembers; they need each other to maintain their identity as skinheads. Unlike the functional dependence of individuals who are linked by economic factors, the dependence among the crew members is a voluntary construct. Even those elements of dependence that seem the most tangible can be conceived as by-products of an individual's involvement in the crew. For example, the crew may be seen to offer protection for members, but most of the threats that the crew members face can be linked back to their involvement in a crew or the racist skinhead subculture.

Involvement in the skinhead subculture is entirely voluntarily. Individuals make the choice to become a racist skinhead and to join a crew. As a result continued involvement in the subculture depends on the individual continuing to derive satisfaction from the subculture. If that satisfaction wanes, then the individual will most likely abandon the subculture. The ability to quite easily leave the crew is in many ways one of the defining features of the skinhead crews from a conflict management standpoint. It is one of the characteristics that

distinguishes skinhead crews from related phenomena like inner-city gangs or outlaw motorcycle clubs. Long term commitment to particular crews or the skinhead subculture in general did not seem particularly high, with a majority of skinheads moving on to other subcultures or adopting a more conventional lifestyle. This conception of skinhead crews as a product of individuals who join together out of individual desires to establish and maintain a certain identity suggests support for criminologist models that conceive of gangs as gatherings of like-minded deviant individuals (Glueck and glueck, 1950; Yablonski, 1962; Thrasher, 1963; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Battin et al, 1998).

Influence of the Media and Watchdog Groups

In his book *Hells Angels* Hunter S. Thompson suggests that the media was largely responsible for the proliferation of outlaw motorcycle gangs. Movies like *The Wild One* provided a template for being an outlaw biker, a description of the proper dress, attitudes and behaviors for that role. The media provided a unifying identity, an explanation of what it meant to be an outlaw biker to both the public and to the bikers themselves (Thompson, 1967). In the same vein, it might be argued that much of what we 'know' about skinheads in the United States is a product of information presented by the media and by watchdog groups like the ADL and the SPLC. I would argue that this information also pervades the academic understanding of skinheads. It is interesting to note that with the exception of Mark Hamm's *American Skinheads*, many academics seem to be unaware of the academic work on skinheads and instead draw their material from media and activist sources and that this has continued to occur

even as an increasing body of academic work on skinheads has become available.

By expanding the threat of skinheads by presenting them as both more organized and more ideologically motivated than the available evidence suggests; the groups that dominate the cultural discourse on skinheads have created a moral panic. This sets up a situation in which the evil specter of racist skinheads is invoked in explanations of events such as the Columbine shootings (Koerner, 1999) that have little to do with skinheads or the skinhead subculture.

In the years since I collected my data I have noticed that skinheads on internet message boards have begun to express resentment towards the media and academic attention directed at their subculture. One skinhead went so far as to post exorbitant hourly rates for giving interviews. While the skinheads make a show of annoyance about the intrusion of researchers into their world, one suspects that they actually revel in the attention. In the course of my interviews several older skinheads wistfully mentioned a time when there was much more media attention. Sensationalist attention from academics, watchdog groups, and especially the media helps to validate the skinhead subculture by providing an affirmation that they are important. Without the attention the skinheads are merely a blip on the cultural radar. It seems that pervasive media attention may both serve to inflate the importance of skinhead crews and to encourage future attention getting behaviors by crew members (Moser, 2004).

Limitations

This study has a number of methodological limitations that need to be acknowledged.

Non-random Sample

Because of the nature of the population I was going to study it was not feasible to try and collect a random sample. In order to gain access into the world of racist skinheads I used a sampling method that is commonly used in sociology and criminology to study deviant populations called network or snowball sampling. Snowball sampling has a tendency to produce a biased sample as each link in the referral chain is likely to have a relationship with those who come before and after. This can create a sample in which many of the respondents share similar characteristics (Davis, 1986; Lee, 1993). However, this may be less of a problem with racist skinheads who are a relatively homogeneous population.

Because I did not use a random sample my findings and conclusions are limited to the skinheads I studied and should not be taken as applying to all skinheads. However, since my sample included members of 5 crews from several areas in the North Eastern United States and Eastern Canada, and since my findings across the crews were fairly consistent, it might be reasonable to assume that the observed attitudes and behaviors are fairly typical of racist skinheads in those regions.

Regional Variation

This project focused on skinhead crews in the North Eastern United States and Eastern Canada. Skinheads in other regions may have different attitudes and characteristics. As previously mentioned, some racist skinhead crews on the west coast have become involved in the street-level distribution of drugs, primarily methamphetamine (Finnegan, 1998; Schafer and Navarro, 2003). Skinheads who are heavily involved in dealing illegal drugs are likely to evidence different behaviors than those who are not involved in such activity. In any given region the skinhead subculture will be likely to have incorporated local cultural elements creating variations in skinhead characteristics and behavior between regions.

Other factors are also likely to play a role in regional variation. Population composition and residential patterns may play a role. Factors such as the degree of residential separation between whites and minorities may partly determine the amount of racial and ethic violence in which racist skinheads are involved. It is possible that skinheads in some areas engage in less racial or ethnic violence because there is less opportunity for such violence due to limited interaction with members of minority groups (Baron, 1997).

Honesty and Accuracy of Reporting

Since this was an interview based project, it is limited by the accuracy of the information provided by the respondents. Although research suggests that self-reported accounts of deviant behavior are largely accurate (Hindelang, Hirschi and Weis, 1981; Huizinga and Elliot, 1996), there are still potential issues. Moore (1994) and Smith (2000) identify the skinhead penchant for recounting

stories with action themes. As a result one might expect skinhead accounts of behavior to be skewed towards more exciting and perhaps atypical conflicts. This might serve to exaggerate the extent to which violence is used to handle conflicts.

Theoretical Implications

In this research I used Black's structural theory of conflict management as an alternative way to explain skinhead violence. In the course of using Black's theory I believe I have both made some contributions to the body of work based on Black's ideas, and raised some questions about the practical application of the theory to complex modern settings.

Organizational Structure and Conflict Management

A number of researchers have used Black's formulations to look at how organizational structure shapes internal conflict management (Morrill, 1989, 1992, 1995; Tucker, 1989, 1993, 1999; Baumgartner, 1992). Others have considered how organizational ties influence both principal party and third party behavior in conflicts (Cooney, 1998; Philips and Cooney, 2005). Morrill (1995) alludes to the idea that organizational structure influences conflicts with parties external to the organization, but generally focuses on internal conflicts. The current study may be the first to use Black's concepts to explicitly examine how an organizations structure may shape the outcome of both internal and external conflicts across cases.

The findings suggest that partisanship is a common characteristic of out-group conflicts, but is rare in in-group conflicts. The findings supports Black's

argument that strong social ties produce partisanship while crosscutting ties between third parties and both principal parties reduce the likelihood of partisanship behavior (Black, 1998). The findings also suggest that third party partisanship increases the likelihood of conflicts being handled with violence. Once again this is consistent with Black's theoretical predictions (Black, 1998).

Among the racist skinheads, internal conflicts were likely to only involve the principal parties. The individual nature of these conflicts makes them similar in character to the majority of violent conflicts seen in modern societies. However in conflicts with people outside the crew, other crew members tended to act as partisans, and these conflicts often took on a collective character. Such conflicts also tended to involve more severe violence than the in-group conflicts.

The above findings suggest that organizational affiliation is an important dimension of the relational structure of a conflict. This type of relationship has received limited attention in previous research on the relationship between the social structure of conflicts and violent actions. In this study, the organizational ties between the parties involved in a conflict played a major role in shaping the actions of both principal and third parties. Partisanship behavior was strongly influenced by organizational ties, as was the likelihood and severity of violence.

Measurement of Blackian Variables

The difficulty of measuring some of the concepts that Black (1998) uses in his structural theory of conflict has been noted in previous research (Philips, 2003; Philips and Cooney, 2005). Cooney (2002) has suggested that part of the reason some studies have not shown support for Black's theoretical propositions

is the use of inappropriate measures of the concepts. In the course of the current study I found some of the relationships that are important in Black's models difficult to assess. One particular difficulty stemmed from my use of the Black's theory to examine both in-group and out-group conflicts. Concepts that were relatively easy to measure within organizations like the skinhead crews became problematic when I began to look at conflicts with outsiders. The measurement of the status variable was especially problematic in this regard. The characteristics of modern societies can make the assessment of the relative status of disputants difficult to assess. The development of explicit measuring schemes for Black's concepts, especially as they relate to modern societies, would allow the explanatory power of the theory to be more clearly illustrated.

Sources of Solidarity

My research suggests further explication of the factors that generate high levels of social solidarity might be desirable. Senechal de la Roche (2001) argued that solidarity is seen when people have extensive ties to one another including close relational ties, shared culture and mutual interdependence. However in the case of the skinheads, we see solidarity built around a subcultural identity and membership in a crew. While the skinheads share cultural, organizational and relational ties, they are not functionally dependent on one another in an economic sense. The fact that the solidarity among the skinheads has its genesis in voluntary involvement in a subculture raises questions about the kind and degree of interdependence that is required for solidarity to arise among the members of a group.

Other Avenues for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several other avenues for future research.

The Nature of the Skinhead Subculture

My research suggests that many of the characteristic of racist skinheads that researchers have attributed to racist ideology may instead have a cultural explanation. To my knowledge no academic research has looked at skinheads in the United States without focusing on a particular faction. An understanding of the common characteristics of all American skinheads would make it a much simpler task to determine what behaviors are linked to subcultural involvement and what behaviors are linked to other factors, such as white-supremacist ideology.

The Persistence of Racism

One question that arose as a result of this research pertains to the persistence of the racist aspect of the skinhead subculture other time. Since the current research suggests that there is tension between adult white supremacist groups and skinheads, and that many skinheads seem more invested in the skinhead subculture than in a particular ideology, the question is salient. Why doesn't the racist aspect fall away?

One possible explanation has been offered by Blazak (2001) who suggests that skinheads are marginalized young males who feel that their social position is being threatened by status gains made by minorities and women. Their displays of racism and sexism may be a reaction to these social changes. In the post Civil War American South, elements of the white population used

violence, often in the form of lynching, to reinforce what they considered to be the proper arrangement of the races (Tolnay and Beck, 1995). Skinhead violence against minorities could be conceived of in a similar manner. It might be seen to serve as a way to punish members of minority groups for their social advances, and a way to reinforce the perceived superiority of the skinheads.

Another possible explanation can be drawn from the work of Merkl, who studied West Germany Neo-Nazis in the 1970's and 1980's. Merkl (1986) suggested that Neo-Nazi and racist identities were attractive to young people who sought public attention. He also noted that people he referred to as hooligans and "weapons fetishists" who were attracted to weapons and violence seemed to be attracted to Neo-Nazi groups. This raises the question of the image that Nazism and its attendant symbols invoke. It is possible that violent people are attracted to the violent and powerful imagery of fascism. Nazi ideology could be a tool that racist skinheads use to establish a fearsome persona, rather than a set of strong beliefs.

Study of Violent Action

Although the skinheads were more than willing to engage in acts of violence, they were not always violent. The results of this study suggest that violent events are not simply an extension of violent tendencies, but are a worthy object of study in their own right. Further research is needed on the situational contexts and the structural conditions that promote violence.

Conclusion

In the course of my research I did not find support for the widely held view that skinhead violence is primarily driven by racist beliefs or by exposure to white-supremacist ideology. The skinheads I interviewed displayed a high degree of variability in the extent to which they held strongly racist and/or white supremacist views. In addition, many of the skinheads were skeptical of the ideologies and motives of adult white-supremacist organizations. Although violence directed towards racial and ethnic minorities and homosexuals did occur, these cases comprised 16% of the total number of violent conflicts. The remaining 84% of the violent conflicts involved a variety of adversaries including other skinheads, punk rockers, and young white strangers. The limited numbers of minority adversaries many represent a lack of interaction and opportunity for conflict. However, if skinheads were strongly motivated by white supremacist ideology, it would be reasonable to expect them to seek out ideologically informed targets. The skinheads' tendency to instead come into conflict with convenient adversaries suggests that the acts of violence may be a product of more than the characteristics of the victims.

By employing Black's structural theory of conflict management, I was able to identify several factors that promoted violent conflict handling across cases. One important factor was the shared relational, cultural and organizational ties that created solidarity between the members of a crew. Crew solidarity promoted strong third party partisanship especially when combined with polarized conflict

structures. These were the conditions under which violence was most likely to occur.

My findings suggest that explanations that imply that acts of skinhead violence are simply an extension of violent tendencies stemming from white supremacist beliefs or values are problematic. Such ideas seem to be based on an incomplete understanding of the skinhead subculture and of the diverse array of conflicts in which skinheads are involved. The media, watchdog groups, and academics who have been cavalier with information from these sources, have all played a role in presenting a less than accurate picture of skinhead violence.

A theory like Black's that distinguishes violent tendencies from violent actions provides a different way of explaining when, where, and with whom violence will occur. Instead of assuming that people with violent tendencies will always act violently, Black asks, under what structural circumstances will a person act violently? It is by answering this latter question that we can gain a greater understanding of violent actions.

APPENDIX A

STATISTICS

A Note on Interpreting Odds Ratios

Odds ratios provide a measure of association for the relationship between two binary variables. The first of these variables is a condition or characteristic. The second variable is an outcome variable. An odds ratio of 1 indicates that there is no association between the two variables. Odds ratios of greater than 1 indicate that the odds of an outcome of interest occurring increase when a specified condition is present. An odds ratio of less than 1 indicates that the odds of an outcome of interest occurring decrease when a specified condition is present. Odds ratios will never be less than zero. When odds ratios are calculated, a 95% confidence internal for the true value of the odds ratio is also calculated. An odds ratio can be considered to be statistically significant if its attendant confidence interval does not contain 1 (Bland and Altman, 2000).

Chapter 5

Page 183: Conflict Handling by Principal Party Characteristics

Chi-square = 2.443 with 3 degrees of freedom
Significance level = 0.486
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance.

Page 184: Conflict Handling by Principal Party Relationship

Model 1: Principal Party Relationship and Violent Conflict Handling (n=145)

Relationship between Principal Parties

	Stranger	Acquaintance	Friend/Associate	Total
Violent	46	32	10	88
Nonviolent	26	25	6	57
Total	72	57	16	145

Chi-square = 0.825 with 2 degrees of freedom
Significance level = 0.662
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance

Model 2: Principal Party Relationship and Violent Conflict Handling (n=129)

Relationship between Principal Parties

	Stranger	Acquaintance	Total
Violent	46	32	78
Nonviolent	26	25	51
Total	72	57	129

Chi-square = 0.799 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.371
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 1.382
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (0.679 – 2.813)

Model 3: Principal Party Relationship and Violent Conflict Handling (n=73)

Relationship between Principal Parties

	Acquaintance	Friend/Associate	Total
Violent	32	10	42
Nonviolent	25	6	31
Total	57	16	73

Chi-square = 0.207 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.649
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 0.768
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (0.246 – 2.400)

Page 186: Violent Conflict Handling, Minorities versus White Strangers

Chi-square = 0.108 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.742
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance

Page 187: Alcohol Consumption and Violent Outcomes (n=158)

Alcohol Consumed before the Conflict

	Yes	No	Total
Violent	74	25	99
Nonviolent	45	14	59
Total	119	39	158

Chi-square = 0.046 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.83
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance

Page 187: Alcohol Consumption and Conflicts with Minorities

Alcohol Being Consumed

	Yes	No	Total
Minority or Homosexual	16	10	26
Other	103	29	132
Total	119	39	158

Chi-square = 3.178 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.075
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, but significant at the $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 0.450
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (0.185 – 1.098)

Page 189: Third Party Social Ties and Partisanship (n=144)

Third Party Social Ties

	Discrete	Cross-cutting	Total
Partisanship	75	5	80
Other Behavior	33	31	64
Total	108	36	144

Chi-square = 33.75 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = .000
Significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.5$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 14.091
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (5.033 – 39.449)

Page 190-191: Third Party Action and Conflict Handling

Model 1: Third Party Action and Violent Conflict Handling (n=144)

Chi-square = 8.76 with 3 degrees of freedom
Significance level = 0.033
Significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance

Model 2: Partisanship and Violent Conflict Handling (n=144)

General Third Party Action

	Partisanship	Other	Total
Violent	58	32	90
Nonviolent	22	32	54
Total	80	64	144

Chi-square = 0.768 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.006
Significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 2.636
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (1.318 - 5.275)

Model 3: Skinhead Partisanship and Violent Conflict Handling (n=115)

General Skinhead Third Party Action

	Partisanship	Other	Total
Violent	55	20	75
Nonviolent	17	23	40
Total	72	43	115

Chi-square = 10.594 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.001
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 3.721
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (1.656 – 8.357)

Page 191: Partisanship and Severity of Violence

Model 1: Partisanship and Severity of Violence (n=90)

General Third Party Action

	Partisanship	Other	Total
Injury	46	19	65
Violence without Injury	12	13	25
Total	58	32	90

Chi-square = 4.085 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.043
Significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 2.623
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (1.015 – 6.778)

Model 2: Skinhead Partisanship and Severity of Violence (n=75)

General Skinhead Third Party Action

	Partisanship	Other	Total
Injury	43	11	54
Violence without Injury	12	9	21
Total	55	20	75

Chi-square = 3.91 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.048
Significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 2.932
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (0.987 – 8.71)

Chapter 6

Page 226: Alcohol Consumption and Violence (n=53)

Alcohol Consumed before the Conflict

	Yes	No	Total
Violent	17	6	23
Nonviolent	16	14	30
Total	33	20	53

Chi-square = 2.347 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.126
No significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.1$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 2.479
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (0.766 – 8.028)

Chapter 7

Page 253: Likelihood of Violence by Group Membership (n=211)

Status of Second Principal Party

	Outsider	Crewmember	Total
Violent	99	23	122
Nonviolent	59	30	89
Total	158	53	211

Chi-square = 6.038 with 1 degree of freedom
Significance level = 0.014
Significant association between variables at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance
Odds ratio = 2.189
95% confidence interval for true difference in odds = (1.164 – 4.116)

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building
51 College Road
Durham, New Hampshire 03824-3585
(603) 862-3564 FAX

LAST NAME	Bowen	**FIRST NAME**	Derek
DEPT	Sociology - Horton SSC	**APP'L DATE**	8/20/99
OFF-CAMPUS ADDRESS (if applicable)		**IRB #**	2184
		REVIEW LEVEL	EXP
PROJECT TITLE	Social Control in Racist Organizations		

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research reviewed your response to its concerns, and approved the protocol for your project.

Approval is granted for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a project report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your project is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. (Please refer to the Assurance of Compliance and the Belmont Report, enclosed.)

Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation. If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact me directly at 862-2003.

Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Kara L. Eddy, MBA
Regulatory Compliance

cc: File
James Tucker, Sociology

Modification entered: 9/8/99

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